

CREATURES
OF CIRCUMSTANCE

HUTCHINSON



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CREATURES OF CIRCUMSTANCE

A Novel

BY

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"GOLF" (BADMINTON LIBRARY), "FAMOUS GOLF-LINKS," ETC.

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CREATURES OF CIRCUMSTANCE.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THEY LOST THE CREATURE.

MEANWHILE, amongst others of its great men, the world had lost the Creature's father. He had died of thirst, the Creature said, meaning of its too frequent gratification. The Creature had been very restless under this blow, so Robert Burscough took it with him to America. Mr. Fleg, too, was eloquent in favour of the Creature's company, scientifically interested in observing how the brain

of all the geniuses would deal with the facts of the New Continent.

Unhappily the Creature never got there.

It was the crowded time of Transatlantic passage. There was no room on the fast boats. Ten days was the least in which they could expect to be beneath the aegis of the Statue of Liberty in the gallant tub in which they were embarked. The passengers regarded each other with the mistrust of strange dogs, which a conspicuous notice of warning against card-sharpers and pick-pockets did not go to dispel. Robert and Mr. Fleg had a third occupant of their cabin. He might be one or the other, or both. At best it is degrading to suffer *mal-de-mer* in a stranger's presence. It should be done in secret, like charity.

Chief of all mistrusted ones was the Creature. Every one involuntarily shrank from the mighty head and abnormal chin, and looked after them in vague disquiet. The sailors, less mistrustful of self, made friends with it. Sailors are fond of pets. It was an "intermediate," and "intermediates" are not allowed "aft"; but in the capacity of body servant to Robert Burscough, the Creature claimed to go where it listed, and no one interfered. At Queenstown fresh passengers came on board. The idea of possession is strong in the human—and British breast. When we enter an omnibus or a railway carriage, the passengers move up and make room with a "d——n it all; I suppose I must make the best of you, but you are an awful nuisance," air.

So it was with the passengers from Liverpool, and their common resentment of the Hibernian invasion was their first bond of sympathy.

Here, too, strange beings scaled up the ship's side in the bight of a rope—men and women scarcely distinguishable. The Creature greeted them with friendliness. Though they could not speak each others dialect, they knew they were akin. The Irish "Creatures" sold bog-wood pipes at a dollar a piece to saloon passengers, then took the remnant "for'ard" and sold them for about a shilling in the "steerage"; but to the Creature, who had no money, they gave one, saying, "Corban," out of their royal bounty. Then the Creature begged some tobacco, and smoked with much pain and grief until it made itself

wholesomely ill ; for it was not used to tobacco, especially out of a bog-wood pipe. Sea-sick it was unlikely to be ; for sea-sickness comes from the brain, and it was doubtful how much the Creature had of brain. They were fated to know more of this later on.

In the meantime, the Creature's habit was to sit about among the steerage passengers, or steal aft and listen in the background to conversations in which Robert and Mr. Fleg took part. It had much and a variety to hear. There were types of each sort of American—the New Yorker, more English than the English, who goes on the side walk with his trousers turned up "because it is raining in London" ; the Southerner, who antedates the millennium to a period

"before the war"; and the Yankee of the deepest dye, who says "Haow?" when he means "What?" The New Yorker did not converse, because conversation was not an English custom.

The Yankee had a good deal to say, principally about Great Britain. He had been a week in England, in which time he said he had seen the whole of it, and had made up his mind that he would not live there if they were to give him the Island. He was able to see into the future, and did not prophesy smooth things. "In five years' time," he told the Creature, "there will be a coalition of France, Russia, and America, and the British nation wiped off the face of the globe. England won't do; we have had too much of her. We'll just take up

Great Britain, and drop her into the Mississippi."

To emphasise this, he then expectorated many times into a spittoon at the opposite end of the smoking room, with the force, rapidity and precision of a gatling gun ; and the Creature left him, rather frightened and much impressed.

There was the wife of a General in the United States army with her husband, who was perfectly broken, and, in his wife's presence, never spoke. To impress one the more with the glory of her conquest, her talk was ever of him and his victories in Indian warfare. Pawnees and Choctaws so abounded in it as to convey a suggestion of scalps at her girdle. The passengers knew her as "the Squaw." Nicknames become, a

necessity on ship-board where real names are not known. A girl once appears with her hair down, and henceforward she is known as "The girl with her hair down her back," plait she it up never so tightly.

By degrees all grew fond of the Creature. The uncouth gentleness, which at first repelled, grew to attract. If anyone had anything to say and others would not listen, the Creature was always ready—a universal listener, never wanting to talk, and never bored. In the weariness and *dolce far niente* of a life in which sense of time and all sense of responsibility for the world's working were alike lost, such a Creature was a god-send. Strange things it must have heard—a queer medley, if it believed them all.

An American clergyman was on board. The Squaw told the Creature that his mission in Rome had been the conversion of the Pope. To one of those persons who are a fund of small information which no one wants to hear, the Creature was invaluable. He told the Creature why a barber's pole was striped, the origin of the expression "I don't care a rap"—viz., the rupees, annas, pice, of India—and a thousand more things of equal interest. Robert named him, "The man with the memory"; he had the cheerful complexion and the smooth confidence of a man of aggressively good digestion. Mr. Fleg had laid a trap and caught him; but "The man with the memory" was unconscious of it. "Can you tell me, my dear sir," Mr. Fleg

had asked, with his customary deference, "whence comes the quotation, 'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb'?"

"That, sir," said the man with the memory, Johnsonially—"that comes from the Psalms of David."

It was like the man with the memory to assign their authorship with such superfluous care.

On the third day the Creature's motive in listening to these facts became known. Among the "intermediates" was a girl who was blind. She had been sent to Europe, by the charity of friends, to a noted oculist at Wiesbaden. Further, it was thought that the voyage would benefit her. She was now going back, after undergoing an operation of which the good effects, if any, might probably be

felt during the voyage. But she had come aboard with everything around her, total night.

With the queer instinct that drew the Creature to anything dumb, or childish, or undeveloped, it had at once attached itself to this girl. For hours it would sit beside her and listen. The girl could talk—with fine eloquence, for she was a Southerner—and she was well informed, though of humble family, for she had been a “school-marm.”

They did not know what she thought of the Creature, but they used to see them sitting side by side for hours upon the deck, the Creature listening, she talking. Sometimes the Creature would come aft and listen to the man with the memory, the Squaw, the Yankee. Then he would

go back to the blind girl, and tell her what he had heard.

"I don't like it," Robert declared. The Creature's getting into the toils. What do you think she talks to him about?"

"Indeed, my dear sir," said Professor Fleg, "I am at a loss to know. But I conceive there would be nothing underhand or unjustifiable in our going forward to overhear, provided we listen in an open and undisguised manner."

So they went forward, and to their surprise, found the Creature in possession of the rostrum. It had just come back from a prowl aft, and was telling the girl, with a curious word-for-word carefulness, all it had heard. The exactness of its repetition was scarcely human—quite un-

modified by passage through another intellect. Her spiritual face—refined by pain—in the intensity of her listening, was close beside the Creature's monstrous one, fearfully close, as it seemed to the spectators, closer perhaps than one who had the power of sight could have borne.

"It is like Bottom and Titania," Mr. Fleg whispered, not without a shudder.

When the Creature came to the narration of some of the Yankee's remarks about the war, the blind girl stopped it. She began to speak with fiery Southern eloquence.

"How does he know anything about it?" she said indignantly. "He can't. He never was in the South; or if he was, he can have known nothing of our feeling in the war, or of the position of our slaves

before it. Before the war there were no happier people than the darkies on the face of the earth. All night long, in the cabins, we used to hear them singing — they have splendid rich voices — and laughing, and banjo-playing. They need hardly any sleep — their brains are not active” — this to the Creature! But was not the Creature’s brain too inactive for it to be sensitive about its inactivity?

“They think hardly at all, and never feel the want of sleeping. But since the war there has not been an honest guffaw of darkey laughter heard in the South. The cares of life have come upon them. Before that they had no cares. Their food and clothes were found for them, and they were tended, and given

medicine if they were sick. Believe me," said the blind girl-orator, putting out her hand in search of the Creature's hand, to impress it the more—"believe me, slavery, as we knew it in the South, was the grandest patriarchal institution in the world. There was the slave-owner, sitting like a petty prince upon his throne, dispensing happiness to his subjects, perhaps a thousand in number, his thoughts ever busied with projects for their good, while they looked up and revered him as their kind and all-powerful father. I do not say that slavery was for the material good of the South—I do not think it was—but I do say that it made most powerfully for moral and social improvement, and the cultivation of all the arts of leisure.

"It is my solemn belief," said the blind

girl reverently, "that the slavery of the black races was the beneficent intention of Providence in the cause of religion and civilisation. It was a missionary enterprise on the grandest scale in the world; and had it not been for the iniquitous action of the North in abolishing slavery—a mere philanthropic pretext to throw dust in the eyes of Europe, for the real reason of the war was a fiscal one—I believe there would have come a time for a great exodus, when the darkies should have gone back among their own people in the heart of Africa, bearing the blessings of Christianity with them, to illuminate the dark continent with its bright beams."

And the girl paused, with parted quivering lips, in an intensity of emotion. It was a highly-strung nature, and her blind-

ness had its source rather in weakness and over-irritability of nerves than in any organic ill. Therefore it was that, after operation, the doctor looked to the tonic of the sea-voyage to do her good. But as yet she was little better, though able to distinguish degrees of light and darkness.

But the pity of it all, as the girl poured this high-toned eloquence into the great blank brain of the Creature! What conception had she formed of him? It was an uncanny, unnatural sight. On Robert Burscough and Professor Fleg, it had a kind of fascination.

To break the spell, Mr. Fleg approached the girl. "Pardon me, my dear madam," he said gently; "do you really go as far as to say, that you would wish to see slavery re-established?"

The girl turned her flushed, excited, blind face. "Yes," she said a little scornfully. "I go as far as that. I even go farther, and I say that I should like to see the slave trade re-established! Oh yes—I know what you would say—‘the horrors of the middle passage,’ and so forth. But I tell you, there were no horrors about the middle passage until you English pseudo-philanthropists declared slavery to be piracy. Pardon me, sir, but I judge you English by your accent, and by *pseudo*-philanthropists I only mean that you tried to be philanthropic, and so failed in a complete absence of any knowledge of the facts. Before the pseudo-philanthropic era, the slaves were well tended on the voyage—given plenty of space—it was to the

interest of the slaver to deliver them in good condition in America. When any captured slaver was run up to the yard-arm, then of course they began to pack them; and the horrors of the middle passage began, that their numbers might pay for the peril of the service."

The girl paused a moment. Mr. Fleg did not answer, so she went on. "I cannot see your face, and I do not know if you like fairy tales, but I will tell you one. After many days' journeying through the African forests, we come, let us say, to the court of the king of Dahomey, in a clearing of the jungle. Before him are blazing a hundred bonfires, behind are a thousand dusky prisoners, bound, and waiting the coming of the executioner. You, good philanthropic Englishman, go

to him with your Bible in hand, and appeal to him in the name of mercy—in the name of all his gods, to let these men go free—in vain. I, less philanthropic, but more practical, have brought a few bags of beads and rolls of smart cloth. I say to the king, ‘Oh, great king, take these beads and this cloth, and give me these thousand prisoners.’ And the king agrees. I take these men to America, feed them, clothe them, civilise them, Christianise them! Which was the real friend of these men—you with your philanthropy, or I with my beads and cloth?”

Professor Fleg began to lose sight of the Creature, and of the dramatic interest of the situation, in the interest of the discussion.

“But, my dear madam,” he objected

gently, "this would be but another inducement to your friend, the king of Dahomey, to go to war, that he might capture prisoners to sell them."

"And the king of Dahomey, sir," the blind girl replied with conviction, "would thus be doing the work of Providence in bringing these prisoners within the possible touch of happiness and civilization."

"At all events, my dear madam," said Mr. Fleg, "it is indisputable that the slave trade made the white man most cordially hated in Africa."

"Then, let the white man be hated in Africa," said the blind girl, "that the black man may be civilized and Christianised in America; yes, and eventually in Africa, too."

Robert and Professor Fleg, went aft,

leaving the blind girl with the last word. For a little while neither spoke. Then Robert said—

“I don’t like it.”

“Don’t like what, my dear sir?” Mr Fleg asked.

“Why, the girl talking to the Creature like that. There’s no knowing what’ll happen to a head like that if it gets ideas of that sort into it.”

“I don’t think, my dear sir,” Mr. Fleg said, “you need be afraid of ideas getting into its head. I think its capacity is limited to the concrete.”

In the evening the Creature came to Robert’s state-room. It saluted and said—

“Can I speak?”

“I’ll be hanged if I know whether you

can or not," Robert said, laughing. It isn't often you try. Go ahead! What is it?"

"I'm leaving yer."

"Leaving me, are you?" said Robert in blank amazement. Why? Where are you going? Overboard?"

"Wi' the blind girl."

"Where to?"

"To be married."

"To be *what*?"

"Married."

"You!—married!—to that girl!—you! —it's—why!—it's impossible!"

"Why?"

"Well—why?—why, don't you see it is? She's well-educated, and you're—well—not. You can't marry her."

"Why?" the Creature asked again.

Then it added, with terrible simplicity, "she's blind!"

Robert could not bear it. The tears sprang to his eyes. He took the Creature by its two ponderous shoulders and pushed it from the state-room.

He sent the steward for Professor Fleg, and told him what had happened.

"What is to be done?" he asked helplessly, when he had finished.

"Nothing, my dear sir," said Mr. Fleg; "nothing. You had better let things take their course."

"But somebody should tell her, you know. One cannot let it go on like that—that gifted, refined girl; some one must tell her."

"Tell her what?"

"Why, about the Creature."

“What about the Creature?”

“Why, that he’s—well you know—tell her—tell her—well, tell her that he is ‘the Creature.’”

“Then if some one will have to tell her,” said Mr. Fleg, with something less than his usual elaborate politeness, “that some one will have to be yourself.”

And so they left it.

When they came on deck, the Creature was silently watching the steam steering-apparatus. The great wheel turned round quickly, two or three revolutions, with no visible agency moving it, then stopped a moment or two, as if to think; then off again on the opposite revolution. Its seeming intelligence was rather uncanny.

Robert looked at Professor Fleg, as they stood and watched the Creature, who

stood and watched the machine. Then Robert nodded to the Professor. Each understood his own thought in the other's mind : a comparison of the working of the Creature's sense with the working of the mechanism.

Robert, though greatly troubled, said nothing to the blind girl about the Creature. The Creature persevered in its habits, spending most of its time beside the blind girl, but often coming aft and listening to the conversation. The man with the memory sat much at the stern of the steamer, fishing for stormy petrels with a cork at the end of a long piece of worsted ; but none got their wings entangled. All this the Creature watched reflectively.

The girl's eyes were gaining power. The ship's doctor said that by the end of

the voyage she might be able to discern objects in a good light.

As the days go on, the tedium of such a journey increases. Every little incident is good for endless gossip ; and the blind girl, her eyes, and the devotion of the Creature were much discussed. On the afternoon of the sixth day, Professor Fleg called Robert "for'ard."

"Gome and listen," he said ; "It is worth while. She is telling him stories about the War.

"Then, after all this expectation, and so many reprieves," the girl was saying when they came up, "the soldiery of the North were really upon us. I can perfectly remember it, though I was little. We were all quiet in the parlour, and it was a beautiful, peaceful evening. Suddenly

there was a loud knocking at the door. Our father was with the Southern army ; there was no one to help us. The officer in charge of the soldiers seemed to be sorry for us, but could not disobey his orders, which were to pull down our lovely home to the ground. My mother played the piano beautifully. It was her great delight ; and I remember well her praying that it might be spared ; put in some barn or another, that we might fetch it when happier days came. But the officer had to say that his orders were to leave not a stick of furniture. You see, they treated us as rebels. So mother went to her piano for the last time. First she played our grand old national hymn, ‘ God save the South,’ then ‘ Thy will be done,’ and we walked out into the night.

“That is one of my memories of the War. There was a worse one: when we had to say ‘Good-bye’ to our few old darkey servants. For a long time they would not leave us. It was far more wretched for them than for us. We tried to help them afterwards, but I don’t know what became of them. We were too poor ourselves to do much for them.”

The girl stopped, and talked no more of her history.

“What is to be done, Mr. Fleg?” Robert said, as they went off again. “She cannot marry the Creature, of course. Her friends will meet her at the dock; and what will happen?”

“It is very difficult,” Mr. Fleg said. “But let us wait and see. They say she is getting back her sight. I do not mean

that that will necessarily make a difference ;
but it might."

So they waited.

The girl's eyes were improving rapidly—quicker than the ship's doctor had dared to hope. As the Creature led her up and down, she could see people in vague outline, at several yards distance. She made the Creature lead her into the bows, with some half-playful, half-earnest, altogether pathetic idea of sighting land. It was many hundred miles off, and she could have been aware of it at, perhaps, ten yards. She used to look into the Creature's face longingly, her own held close to it, with no expression but that of love. No one quite knew how much she saw.

They were coming to the end of the

voyage, and were already beginning to expect a pilot, when the Creature presented itself again, with a salute, at Robert's state-room.

"Well, what is it?"

"I beant going to leave 'ee."

Robert was used to the Creature, but its ways often startled him. A hopeful sense of relief came to him.

"Why? Are you not going to marry her?"

"No," said the Creature, with no change of expression.

"Why not, eh? I think you are quite right; but why?"

"Because her eyes are coming back."

"She's getting her sight, you mean? Yes—well—and—and"—it was rather difficult to go on—"she has told you?"

The Creature interrupted the difficulty—

“No, she hasn’t told me ; but I’ve told her.”

“What ? That you cannot marry her ?”

“No. That she can’t marry me. ’Tis this way ; her eyes are coming back, and I—you know.”

Again the Creature had reduced its young master to the speechlessness of moist eyes and a choking throat. It saluted and left the state-room.

Then it went back to its habits, still leading the girl and sitting in the bows with her.

The pilot had been taken on board, and all were thinking of their landing. The ship was making good way through a light, choppy sea.

Suddenly a cry, scarcely human, came

from the bows, followed instantly by a perfectly human shout, "Man overboard!" Two gallant fellows were over the side in a moment; life buoys were snatched and flung.

As the passengers ran to the side, a huge figure bounded furiously among them, rushing aft. It was the Creature. As it dodged to avoid a passenger, it brought its head with all the fearful force of its rush, against a boat hanging in-board from the davits. It shot backwards and fell on the deck from the violence of the blow; but, in an instant, was on its feet again, in another second had gained the stern, and was over into the sea.

Another moment, and the Creature's great head appeared on the wave, the blood streaming from it. Out of the

turmoil of the screw and the ship's wash, something defined itself on the choppy seas—a woman's dress. In a second the Creature seized it and supported it, while a ringing cheer went down from the deck to its encouragement.

The Creature and she—the girl just recovering sight—in the seas alone together; and for how long? Ages, it seemed to those on deck, while the boat was lowered; and far, far behind, the ship seemed to have left them, though the engines had been reversed on the first alarm.

But the Creature! How had it come to it; this inspiration—for it was nothing less—to rush aft, and there find the girl whom the steamer's wash had carried aft, so that the brave sailors who had

dived over for'ard had missed her? Was it by much watching of the waves and the flotsam and the dancing cork at the end of the fowler's worsted, or was it rather by a sudden inspiration given in compensation for something the intellect had missed?

At length the boat is launched, and the steamer is slowly backing. From deck but occasional glimpses are caught of the figures in the water. The boat comes to first one, and then another of the sailors, but does not stop for them. They cease rowing, and back water suddenly. Then—yes—first one figure and then another are lifted in, and with a huge sigh and a sense of relief, that has an empty, unsatisfied feeling in it, the passengers realize that all—or at least the

worst, the most active excitement — is over.

The boat comes back alongside, and is drawn steadily up to the davits. Carefully the girl is lifted out. There is little the matter with her, plainly, for she is fully conscious. But the Creature !

The tremendous face is a dead white. A handkerchief is over the head, but it is dyed crimson. As the ship's doctor removes it and examines the wound, he says, " My God ! " and that only.

" How is he ? " Robert asked hoarsely.

The doctor took no notice till Robert repeated the question ; then, recognising the Creature's master, he said—

" There is no other man I ever heard of that it would not have killed instantly."

He made them take the Creature to the smoking cabin, which was on deck.

Robert walked up and down before the door. Presently the doctor came out.

“Well, he is dying,” he said, in answer to a look ; “there is no doubt he is dying ; but that he is alive now is a miracle. No man of normal brain could have lived more than an instant. And the extraordinary thing is, that he must have done it when he dashed himself against the boat before going overboard. There is no doubt that he did it then ; and all the while he was in the water, and supporting that girl, he must have had a wound in his head of which an ordinary man would have been dead ten minutes. I believe such cases have been known before with

people of deficient brain power; but I never met one."

Robert asked if the Creature were likely to recover consciousness before death; but the doctor declined to prophesy. It was a case, as he fully allowed, quite beyond him.

The doctor's assistant was with the Creature. The doctor went down to see if the girl had taken harm by her wetting. In a few minutes he was up again.

"That's another remarkable case," he said. "This girl has been slowly recovering her sight for days past. The shock she has just been through has had the most wonderful effect upon her. She can see a very considerable deal better than she could about half an hour ago, when she fell into the water. Of course she is

still under great excitement. When that passes she may have a relapse."

Towards evening the Creature opened its eyes. Its huge jaws seemed to be making an effort to speak; but, looking round, it saw unfamiliar faces, and kept its habitual silence. The doctor called Robert. The Creature did not say anything, but its eyes looked satisfied. Robert took its hand. And so they sat.

Presently the doctor called Robert out.

"It is the blind girl," he explained, "or the girl that was blind, rather," he said. "She is desperately anxious to know if she can do anything for him."

"No," said Robert, almost jealously. "What should she do? Wait, though—can I speak to her?"

She came, and he said—

“You will forgive me for what I am going to say ; this is not a time for false delicacy. You once were going to marry—I mean him—weren’t you ?”

The girl blushed, then said defiantly, “Yes.”

“Well, would you marry him now if he were going to live ?”

She blushed again—a blush of indignation this time.

“Now,” she said ; “now that he has given me life and light ? Why, I belong to him !”

“Then,” said Robert, “go in there and tell him so. Stay ; I’ll lead you.”

He opened the cabin door and made her sit by the Creature’s head, and laid her hand in his, and so he left them.

“No ; it’s no good going in,” the doctor

said. "I will watch at the door, but I can do nothing for him."

So they watched for half an hour. Then the door opened, and the girl came out, stumbling, feeling her way with one hand, while the other held her handkerchief to her eyes.

The Creature was dead ; and on the features, which had so rarely shown expression, was a smile that they had never worn in life.

CHAPTER II.

HOW ROBERT WAS IMPRISONED IN SAN CHIQUITO JAIL.

IN the midst of all this trouble, Mr. Fleg's double spectacles were absolutely scintillating with observation, although it frequently happened to him to wipe them with a silk handkerchief. Great things were going on in the self which was contained under the slight athletic frame of Robert Burscough. This grief at the Creature's death came in a measure as a relief from the more selfish engrossment of his own heart-pains. It took him out

of himself. Also, the responsibility that he had to assume in the management of all concerning the Creature's funeral, was an influence in his moulding. And the clay had been very ready. It was the "*moment psychologique*." In all the difficulties and perplexities of his love for Sybil, the working had been going forward. Then came the shock of her engagement, which had surprised him by finding him so well prepared for it. Then, the tragedy of the Creature's death. Finally, the responsibility that was forced on him in connection with it (for Mr. Fleg, with silent obstinacy, declined any leading part) did the finishing work. The clay was moulded into the form in which it could receive the breath of a life of its own.

He has come into his inheritance of manhood," Mr. Fleg said. "Such as he is, so he will remain, little altered. He will make ends for himself, and strive for them. The drift-wood has found fins. We have found what we have come across the sea to seek. We might as well go home again. He could create now. He could paint a picture."

But they did not go home. They said their farewells to their fellow-passengers, and left the ship in which so much had happened. Robert now seemed to feel himself in a way responsible for the safe conduct of the blind girl (as they still called her, though her sight was wonderfully better) to her friends, who met her at the dock.

"And remember you have promised

to come to Virginia to see me," she said. "And the longer you stay, so much the better you'll please us."

So they said good-bye, promising someday to see her, when the fates led them Southwards, and wondering a little at the free, naive way in which the young lady invited them to her Virginian home. And each involuntarily thought how it would have been had the Creature lived, to be presented to the girl's friends as her affianced bridegroom ; but the thought had too much in it that was sacred, and yet ludicrously shocking, for utterance.

Then they went to one of those many delightful New York hotels, and made themselves at home there for the winter, often going out into society, for they had

many introductions. In course of the summer, they visited Tuxedo and Newport. Later they went on to Boston, where Mr. Fleg was heavily fêted by the American men of science, who are ever ready to recognize foreign genius, though they do get the credit of setting full value on their own. When the Spring came, and the snow was melting on the mountains and prairies, and the trees were putting forth their beauties, they crossed the Great Continent by the noble Canadian Pacific Line, whose glories of scenery beggar all expression of pen or brush. Then they went leisurely down the coast from Vancouver to San Francisco, where at length Robert found himself within reach of his ideal goal in the whole trip, some experience of

wild life in the perfect climate west of the Rockies.

This was not Mr. Fleg's ideal; and while Robert proposed to enjoy himself in the manner of the cowboy, Mr. Fleg preferred to observe San Franciscan life, which repaid him well, through double glasses. Robert had promised to telegraph to him when he arrived "anywhere," and in reliance on that promise, Mr. Fleg's mind was fairly at ease.

San Francisco, within the "Golden Gates," is not always so golden as it should be. In winter it is apt to bear a leaden, dyspeptic look. Sea fog comes up off the Pacific, and squeezes itself out in monotonous rain.

Leaving Mr. Fleg to make such headway against these influences as his

philosophy might inspire, Robert, shortly after Christmas, took boat and steamed southward ; and no sooner had he rounded Point Concepcion than he found himself again in the golden climate, the finest under heaven. After a day or two at Santa Barbara, he went on to San Diego, where he bought a horse, at a most moderate figure, and felt himself prepared to "prospect" the Continent. Further, he bought blankets, a gun, a Spanish saddle and bridle, saddle-bags, some sixty feet of half-inch picketing rope, and a compact store of provisions. He transferred these along with himself and a sketch-book to the back of his steed, which was wiry though it was small, and set out like Don Quixote, in search of virtue in distress or adventure in any form

that might befall. The country was of heavenly beauty. On the West the blue Pacific twinkled slumberously to the snow-capped mountains on the East. He rode over a carpet of emerald "alfilleria," and a semi-tropical sky was his roof.

He was not without a scheme in his wanderings. His notion was to make his way towards the mountains in the direction of the Caesarean mines, and to work through the foot-hills to the city of San Chiquito.

On the third day he was making his way slowly, about dusk, among the variously wooded country, looking about him for a sheltered corner where he might pass the night, when he came upon a camping-party of some fifteen persons. He hesitated for a moment whether to

throw himself on their hospitality and society, but for a moment only—the ringing laughter and merry voices, as he came nearer, were too great a temptation to be resisted after his three days of solitude.

As he drew rein, one of the party accosted him.

“Won’t you alight?” he said, making him free of this country which, under Heaven, had no other owner than the Government of the United States.

Robert thanked the speaker, and proceeded to tie his horse to a tree. Upon this, his hospitable friend came forward and remarked conjecturally.

“Reckon you’re lost!”

Robert answered, that to all intents he was; that he had not the least idea of his whereabouts, but that it did not

greatly signify, for his present journey was without intents and purposes. He was content to be lost.

“Well, make yourself at home, any way,” said he. “Let me introduce you to the crowd.”

“Boys,” said his friend to the company, “let me introduce you to Mr.—— what did you say your name was?”

Robert said that he did not remember that he had mentioned it, but at once told him, and was forthwith introduced to each member of the company in turn. He found himself in remarkably good society—a professor, a judge, two doctors (introduced as “Doc” this, and “Doc” that, respectively), two colonels, and three generals. Mark Twain claims to have met the only man who ever confessed to

the rank of private in the "War." But, then, Mark Twain was a humourist. He may have invented him as a practical joke—one cannot trust humourists. It seemed a curious thing to Robert in this Republican land, where all men are equal, that of the queer crew he had lit on in the wild country of the foot hills, but two were without a title. Of these two, one was a young lawyer, with whose baptismal register he never got any further than "Dick;" the other was by name "Toppie Johnson." Now Toppie Johnson was the backbone of the expedition; he was a practical man—a miner—Robert was assured, of remarkable judgment and integrity. For this was the object of the expedition, mining—to disembowel from the jealous earth its precious treasures of

silver and gold, or what of value it might contain. This it was—or rather to prospect for such riches, like a dog for truffles—that had brought from their cities these men of war, law and learning, who were now seated around a log fire, beneath a spur of the foot hills, practising the fascinating culinary mystery of making “slap-jacks.”

The materials of a slap-jack are as simple as an *ingénue*: flour and water mixed into a dough and placed on a frying-pan, with a little grease at the bottom. Hold the frying-pan over the stove till the slap-jack is cooked on its lower side. There is scope now for much nice judgment, to catch the critical—once lost never to be recovered—moment when the invisible lower side of the slap-jack is

just done to a turn. And then the turn comes, and the crux of the whole mystery. For you have to chuck the slap-jack flying into the air, with a twist of the wrist that shall make it turn a somersault in its flight, and land again with a "slap" and a "smack" that is doubtless the origin of its name, cooked-side uppermost, fair and square on the face of the frying-pan. Then you hold the thing over the fire till the present underside is cooked; and then you burn your mouth eating it too hot! Robert thought he had never tasted any fancy bread in England that is a circumstance to it. And if it is good fun eating it, that is nothing at all to the fun of making it—throwing it up and catching it. The first three or four tries, he kept throwing his slap-jacks all about the

country ; but then he got the knack of it, and would have liked to go on catching slap-jacks all day long. After the first try or two, he used to be allowed, as a great privilege, to make their slap-jacks for the general and the judge.

These miners were a jolly crew. Not too much of the practical miner about them, as it seemed to Robert. But the yarns they told—of pumpkin vines that grew so fast that they dragged the pumpkins round the field after them, and you had to gallop on horseback to overtake and pluck them ! They never seemed to be at an end of their stories, or their faculty for invention.

And the whiskey that they drank ! Robert strongly suspected that the main inducement which brought many of the

party away from their stuffy city offices was the increased capacity, in the fine mountain air, of the human frame for whiskey.

And Toppie Johnson—that practical miner whose shrewd judgment, inflexible morality, and love of sheer hard work, Robert was told, it was hard to over-estimate—he was indeed the backbone of the party. He could play the fiddle and flute, and dance jigs, and hornpipes, and fandangoes, and sing songs humorous or pathetic, or with a seductive blending of the two.

Never a cross word did Robert hear from any one of the party during the ten days or more that he enjoyed their unbounded hospitality, save on an occasion when Dick and Toppie in sky-larking

came into collision with a great demijohn of whiskey. The glass bottle, though protected by its wicker casing, broke, and all its vast possibilities for benefit to poor humanity were wasted on the thirsty soil. Then the language was sulphurous. It was the last demijohn.

Very sadly did they throw and catch their slap-jacks at supper that evening; and after the meal they sat around in gloomy silence. The night, as if in harmony with their mood, was dark as pitch. No one seemed to have the spirit to throw a log on the dying fire and cheer the glim. Then in the dark silence, the judge was heard to clear his throat, as though it suffered from unwonted dryness, and addressing the company at large, he said in slow measured tones—

"I believe I've had enough of mining, anyway. Let's go home. Our wives will be wanting us. What do you say, general?"

"I'm with you, judge," said the general solemnly, as if he were announcing the doom of a court-martial.

It was sweetly naïve, and Robert lay back on the grass and let his feelings loose in peals of laughter.

It showed a want of delicacy, maybe, to laugh when the occasion was so solemn. It was pointed out to him in reproachful comments that his behaviour was in bad taste. But he could but laugh the more; and as a sense of the humour of the situation dawned upon the party, which could not long remain in poor spirits, they all joined in, though the joke was at their own expense.

But he felt he owed them something, and early the next morning saddled his horse, and riding to a store some twenty-five miles distant, returned with a canteen full of whiskey, like a Lancelot from a successful quest for the Holy Grail. This, in the language of the country, made him "solid with the crowd," and on his return Dick expressed his desire to buy his horse and saddle. He said that a horse that could carry that amount of whiskey must be an animal of some mettle. He offered a fair price, and as Robert was beginning to think he had had about enough of camping, he told Dick he could have the horse at the figure named, provided only that Robert could find a means of making his way to a stage road.

Toppie, the invaluable Toppie, over-

heard the conversation, and was at once to the fore with a suggestion.

“Riverside is your nearest point for the stage road, said he. “Ill lend you one of my horses and ride with you into Riverside, if you’ll give me ten dollars when we get there.”

He was a splendid fellow, Toppie—tall and slim, sandy-haired and bearded, with red freckled skin and blue eyes, always in a laugh. In camp he was for ever cracking jokes and telling stories. If for a moment left to his devices, he would be singing snatches of songs for his own amusement, or engaging in a jocular conversation with his horse. He was a poor horseman, nevertheless ; but he knew no fear and no principle, was utterly reckless, and as tender-hearted as a woman. What

more delightful companion for a ride into Riverside! Robert sold his horse to Dick, and promised Toppie the ten dollars when they got to Riverside.

Early the next morning, before daylight, Toppie's merry voice was chanting—

“Get up, get up ; all aboard for Riverside.”

Robert crawled from his blankets, and inquired the reason for such early hours.

“Well, boss,” said Toppie, “we’ll breakfast at the widow’s down the valley, and get to Riverside in time to catch the evening coach to San Chiquito.”

In the dawning light Robert saw two horses ready saddled. Toppie, rolling up the blankets, tied them on the saddle of the horse he proposed to ride. He further took charge of Robert’s gun, and cautioned

him to hurry up and be careful, because the horse he was to ride was not "real gentle."

Robert mounted with care; and, for one not "real gentle," the horse behaved very well.

"That's bully," said Toppie. "Now let's get——" and away he went, with a wild scream and a "Good-bye to you boys," to the still sleeping crowd.

He led the way over the rough mountain-trail at a pace which filled Robert with growing amazement as the day began to alight on the juts and jags and corners of the raw-boned old "work-horse" on which Toppie was mounted. Judging from Toppie's grunts and exclamations, and from the old horse's anything but even gait, it promised to be a journey of some pain for Toppie.

Robert's young horse followed comfortably enough. Soon he took advantage of a slight widening of the track to press alongside his companion, and ask him the reason of the severity of the pace.

Toppie seemed to think the question a joke. For a moment he was too much amused to answer ; then he said—

“ Well, boss, the widow won't give us breakfast, once she's washed up the things.”

There was force in this, and Robert made no further suggestion. The widow was evidently a lady of strength of character.

Luckily they arrived in time ; but the very instant they had finished breakfast, Toppie again sang out, “ All aboard ! ”

Robert could not believe in any necessity for such haste, but was ashamed to

remonstrate. If Toppie could stand it on that stiff old beast, surely he ought not to be showing the white feather.

Toppie evinced all the same anxiety to push forward, even when they were on the fair smooth road running down the San Chiquito valley. Coming alongside of Toppie, as he jolted and groaned on the back of his bag of bones, Robert asked him how he could have undertaken to ride such an animal. He confessed that his mount was no longer a good saddle horse, and in reply to many questions about the horses, showed the most remarkable ignorance. He did not even seem to know their names, and answered most of Robert's inquiries by a groan of intense discomfort.

Robert now began to notice that Toppie was frequently turning round in his saddle

to explore, with a swift glance, the country behind him. Robert asked him what he was looking for, but he evaded the question in a groan of anguish. They had just passed Six Springs, and were within sight of the houses of Riverside, when, turning his head to see what in the world Toppie could be looking for, Robert perceived, at no great distance behind, the dust raised by some horsemen, who were rapidly overtaking them. Toppie pulled his horse to a standstill, and facing Robert with a complex look, in which amusement perhaps predominated, said queerly—

“Its all up with us, boss.”

“What’s all up?” Robert inquired.

“Well, I’ll tell you,” said he. “These ain’t my horses, anyway. I stole them up the valley last night, and now the boys

have caught us. I sold my horses two days ago to one of the boys, and asked him to lay low about it. Say, here come the boys. Shall we fight? What do you say?"

Robert realized the position fully, and also the motive for Toppie's anxiety to accomplish the journey. What was to be done now? He had just time to tell Toppie that if he made a move towards his pistol the fight would begin by Robert's shooting him. When their pursuers were upon them, three fully armed men, with repeating rifles levelled at their heads. "Throw up your hands," they shouted.

Robert took a swift glance at Toppie, and though his hands went into the air, he could scarcely restrain himself from shooting him as he saw a broad grin upon

the sinner's sandy-haired face. His own hands went up, and it was a relief when their captors had disarmed them, and laying their rifles on the horns of their saddles, told them to ride on before.

As they led the procession at a foot's pace, Toppie at once began a parley.

"Say, boys, my pard don't know nothing about this job. It was I as done it, and I lied to him and told him as the horses was mine."

"That's too thin," was the only comment their conquerors vouchsafed. One of them, gently tapping what Robert took to be his horse's picket rope, asked him if he knew why he had brought it along.

Robert said he supposed it was to picket his horse.

“Try again,” he said ; but Robert had no further conjecture at command.

“Well,” said he, “I’ll tell you. It’s to put round the necks of the likes of you.” He went on to assure Robert that had they been overtaken away out in the valley where there was no one about, they would by now have been pendant ornaments of the roadside trees.

Robert did not doubt him in the least, and felt grateful for the vicinity of Riverside.

But Riverside was a little place. It had but one store, and after a brief rest they pushed on to San Chiquito.

The strange cavalcade was an occasion of much public interest in this city. Passengers stood motionless on the sidewalk, and watched their slow procession to the

jail; for San Chiquito is a city with an opinion of itself, and its public buildings justify it. The most cheery member of the party as they rode through the streets of San Chiquito was, unquestionably, Mr. Toppie Johnson.

“Board and lodging cheap, boss,” he said, “for a day or two, all at expense of State, and no work! Glorious country, eh, boss?”

But “boss” was unable to endorse his cheeriness, and sadly they passed into durance in San Chiquito jail.

CHAPTER III.

MR. CHEADLE AS PHILANTHROPIST.

PEBBLECOMBE had not been developing as fast or as far as Mr. Cheadle could have wished. He was disappointed with Pebblecombe. It had made a certain start, but had very soon come to a standstill. He grew restless when he no longer had his boy to objurgate, and took to going to London more frequently than had been his custom.

Of late he had often been found in corners of the club, buttonholing members

and talking to them confidentially. He especially affected the society of Colonel Burscough, and they sat in remote seats and whispered like conspirators. The Cheadle atmosphere was full of mystery.

One day Lord Morningham came into the club with Colonel Burscough. Mr. Cheadle secured him immediately.

“Eh, my lord, such an honour for our little club to have the society of the legislators of the land—eh, Colonel?”

“Hum, hah, haw, yes!” was the Colonel’s answer, with the wave of his “business” arm, which always did duty with him for a lacuna of words.

Mr. Cheadle took the opportunity of drawing Lord Morningham aside.

“Has the Colonel been speaking to you by chance, my Lord, of the Metropolitan

Fish Consumers' Association?" he inquired.

"No, he has not," Lord Morningham answered. "Metropolitan Fish Consumers' Association! I never heard of it."

"Really?" said Mr. Cheadle, with an expression of gentle surprise. "Ah, I thought he would have told you. I assure you, my lord, I believe it to be one of the most promising things ever floated. By great good luck, I happen to know several of those associated with it. Just look at the list of names. Did you ever see anything so splendid?"

He produced the prospectus from his pocket. The Company was started, it was said, with the object—not of employing fishing boats of its own, which had been the bane of so many previous companies

of this description, but of buying fish immediately on landing, and delivering by the Company's own agents to the consumer. Thus the irresponsible, iniquitous middleman would be avoided, who robbed the labourer of the honest amount of his hire and swelled the cost to the consumer. Agencies would be established at suitable points of the Metropolitan area. Fish would be delivered in the Company's own barrows—on special terms to members of the Company. The capital would be a quarter of a million, to be taken up in preference shares of ten pounds, and ordinary shares of one pound.

Not only did the proposed Company promise to be the most extraordinary financial success, but also to confer the greatest boon upon society. The poor

man would be able to get his fish at a reasonable cost. To take shares in such a Company was more than a sound business operation ; it was an absolute act of philanthropy. A warm halo of saintly and shining benevolence seemed to shape itself on Mr. Cheadle's brow as he unfolded the beauties of his evangel.

“ But has not this sort of thing been tried before, and always been defeated by a ring of fishmongers and fishing-boat owners, and so forth ? ” Lord Morningham asked.

“ Never on anything like this scale,” said Mr. Cheadle. “ Look at our capital—a quarter of a million ! ”

“ I sincerely wish I knew how I could get a look at such a sum,” Lord Morningham said. “ But a quarter of a million bears a very small proportion, I should

imagine, to the fishing interest of England."

"Eh, but they are jealous of each other, my lord," said Mr. Cheadle, whispering in the noble ear with a beautifully artistic blending of deference and solicitude, and with all the air of imparting a State secret. "They are too jealous to combine."

"Perhaps they might sink their own jealousies," Lord Morningham suggested, "in their jealousy of you; but still, if you believe this Company to be all you say, why do you not take up more shares in it yourself? You say you can still get me a few at par."

"Ah," said Mr. Cheadle, with a pathos that might have caused a heartache to a man who went by anything but clock-work; "ah, I have no more to invest!"

“Do you mean to tell me,” Lord Morningham asked, “that you have put all you possess into this fishy concern?”

“Well, no,” Mr. Cheadle said, rubbing his nose, as if slightly embarrassed, “not exactly all I have; but all I am for the moment able to realize. And I am wishful to do my friends here a kindness.”

“Yes, I see,” Lord Morningham replied drily. “It is very good of you. I think I will wait until the shares come on the market. They will get a Stock Exchange quotation, I suppose?”

“Oh, certainly, certainly!” said Mr. Cheadle, in a voice expressive of pain at the implication of the suggestion. “Look at the names on the board of administration, my lord.”

Truly they were above challenge. Title,

wealth, and distinction in every profession were represented. Almost every name was a famous one. A few were less known. Of the latter was that of Mr. Cheadle. Lord Morningham looked at him with increased respect, as they parted, that his name should appear in such company.

Mr. Cheadle in London was much like the Mr. Cheadle of Pebblecombe. He still comported himself in the grand old Sir Charles Grandison manner, now, alas ! so rare, with the added charm of the grand old Aberdonian accent.

The board-table of the directors of the International Investment Company was surrounded by faces in which the Semitic type predominated ; but amongst them might often have been seen the pronounced

and puffy Scottish cheek bones and general sandy appearance of Mr. Cheadle. This would have appeared singular to his friends at Pebblecombe, for Mr. Cheadle had omitted to mention to them his connection with the International Investment Company; and the omission was so much the more singular and modest because to the International Investment Company belonged all the credit of the promotion of that benevolent enterprise, the Metropolitan Fish Consumers' Association, in which Pebblecombe, thanks to Mr. Cheadle's kindness, was privileged to hold a considerable interest. A glance at a board meeting of the Company will show ample evidence of his delicacy of feeling in shrinking from the broad glare which beats upon a public man. At the request

of the Chairman, he was informing the board of the very satisfactory progress of their *protégée*, the Fish Consumers' Association—that is to say, the large amount of capital which had already been subscribed. It appeared that Mr. Cheadle's native modesty had prevented his ascribing to himself, when speaking at Pebblecombe of this philanthropic association, anything like as prominent a part in its inauguration as was warranted by the position which he took before the board of the parent Company. All the Semitic ears were attentive to his report of the flourishing finances of their child.

“The next question for our consideration to-day, gentlemen,” said Mr. Cheadle, when this pleasant subject was exhausted, “is the amount of money the Metropolitan

Fish Consumers' Association shall vote to the International Investment Company for its service in promoting the association."

"But, Mr. Cheadle," said one of the gentlemen of the board, "have we not publicly said that we should not ask for any promotion money till the annual general meeting of the Fish Company?"

"That does not prevent the Association voting of its own accord promotion money to us."

"But do you think you will carry it, Mr. Cheadle?"

"I am sure of it. At a meeting we may be outvoted; but on a requisition of five shareholders a poll may be taken, and a poll enables shareholders to vote by proxy. At the same time that we send out notice of the meeting, we will send

to each shareholder a proxy form; it is very simple."

"But, supposing some shareholder disapproves of the voting of this money and sends out proxy forms also, and uses them against us. There will be lots of people who would give their proxy to vote against the payment."

"We will spare the shareholder the trouble, my dear sir. We will ourselves see that proxy forms are sent out by a gentleman who will perhaps be good enough, for a consideration, to change his mind as to the purpose for which he will use them. Have you never had anything to do with the starting of a Company before, sir?" Mr. Cheadle asked pityingly.

"Never on these lines, Mr. Cheadle," said the other gentleman, rubbing his

hands appreciatively. "But I am learning," he said; "I am learning."

"Has any member of the board a friend or relative in the clerical profession who may be depended upon to change his mind for us, for a consideration?" Mr. Cheadle asked. "The title of reverend inspires, and rightly so, great trust and respect."

After a little conversation, one of the Semitic gentlemen said that he had a Gentile brother-in-law in the English Church who, he thought, might be relied upon—for a consideration.

"It is sad," said Mr. Cheadle reflectively, "to see how painfully underpaid are some of our hard-worked clergy. I have no doubt there are many who would be thankful for this chance of an honest

addition to their stipend. May I ask the favour of a letter of introduction to your reverend connection, or would you prefer to sound him on the matter yourself ? ”

The Semitic gentleman, with nice feeling, said that as these matters of business were apt to be delicate between relatives, he would be obliged by Mr. Cheadle’s communicating with the clergyman direct ; and, the note of introduction having been given, the board of the International Investment Company turned its attention to other schemes of profit and philanthropy. The name on Mr. Cheadle’s letter of introduction was the Rev. Mr. McWhat.

“ Dear me,” said Mr. Cheadle, “ perhaps a compatriot ! There is a providence in these things.”

The outcome of the matter was that,

after the proposal for the voting of the money had been overwhelmingly negatived at the general meeting, certain previously instructed allies of Mr. Cheadle demanded a poll. The shareholders further justified Mr. Cheadle's foresight by sending numerous proxies to the Reverend Mr. McWhat, in response to a circular breathing abhorrence of the board and its dealings—all which proxies were obediently laid by the reverend gentleman at Mr. Cheadle's feet, while Mr. Cheadle in return placed in the reverend hand something of a more readily negotiable nature.

CHAPTER IV.

“THE BRAES O’ MAR.”

SAN CHIQUITO jail is a fine building, but planned with inadequate regard to sanitation. In the cell in which Toppie Johnson and Robert were confined the smell was cruel. Otherwise the room was little furnished ; but the smell seemed to suffice for all their wants.

“ Fa’rly solid, the atmosphere here—eh, boss ? ” Toppie suggested.

Robert agreed.

“ Not cold though, eh, boss ? ”

“ What do you suppose they’ll do to us, Toppie ? ”

Toppie made a sign suggestive of a halter round his neck, and a grimace conveying that the necklace was unpleasant. Then, as if ashamed of his momentary loss of spirit—

“Easy death hanging, pard,” he said encouragingly.

“Really?” said Robert. “Have you often tried it?”

“No, pard, no; but I’ve conversed with them that has.”

“Really; how did that happen?”

“Well, you see, it’s this way—once the Indians caught me, and strapped me down on the ground, and lit a slow fire under me, and——”

“But you’ve got your scalp all right, Toppie.”

“Never speak to the man at the wheel,”

said Toppie, with a roar of laughter at his own wit. “Hush, though !” he went on ; “here’s the jailor coming. Merry old bird, ain’t he, boss ?”

For, as the jailor clanked along the passage, he was whistling a merry stave.

“What was the tune ?” Robert asked himself. “So strangely familiar, and so suggestive of old memories !”

But his mind was hustled by the events of the last few hours, and he could not quite get at it.

By the footsteps, the jailor must be accompanied by another ; perhaps the governor, Robert thought. The jailor’s key creaked in the lock, the lock shot back. The door slowly opened, and into the solid smell was ushered a vision which

brought rushing to Robert's mind visions of Little Pipkin—the cricket—Pebblecombe—home.

“‘The Braes o’ Mar,’ by gad! and I never recognised it,” was all he could exclaim in his astonishment, as he stood agaze at the well-remembered yet strangely altered face of Jim Cheadle, the wicked little boy of Little Pipkin, who had tried to steal an innings out of turn on the village green.

And young Cheadle stood there with his hands in his pockets, and a most comical expression of face, as his mouth struggled between a fearful desire for laughter and for the melodious utterance of “The Braes o’ Mar.” But something else contorted his face.

“What was it?” Robert wondered for a

moment. Then he saw : young Cheadle had lost half his nose.

“Wall,” he said, through what was left of it, after they had gazed at each other for a full minute. “Wall, I am derved !”

“Are you ?” said Robert. “I share the feeling entirely. And what might you be doing here ?”

“Wall,” said young Cheadle, “I might be coming here for horse-stealing ; but I ain’t. Or, again, I might be coming here for pleasure, but I ain’t. I can still smell,” and he patted his mutilated organ soothingly. “But what I did come here for was to see whether you’d care to leave, or whether, maybe, you’d prefer to stay at Government expense. It’s a free country.”

“It’s no sech thing,” said Toppie pathetically.

"You're a born skunk, any way," young Cheadle observed, looking at poor Toppie with distaste.

"Wall, come along, ef you're coming," he continued to Robert. "Guess we'll all be asphyxiated if we stop. But say, whatever took you to be playing it so low down as the horse-stealing trick? And playing it derned badly too! Ain't a deadbeat, are you? I thought Britishers were never deadbeats."

"I didn't horse steal, my dear fellow," Robert began; and, seeing Cheadle looking incredulous, Toppie struck in—

"No, sir, that's so. And look here, boss, ef you see a chance of squaring up this little trouble here, with the help of your pard, don't you go minding about me, you know. It's an easy death, swinging, you bet."

And the careless, plucky fellow began singing a rollicking chorus.

"But do you mean to say I'm free, just to walk out as I please?"

"Guess that's so, ain't it, jailor? Suppose you'll have to square the judge, though, won't he?"

The jailor nodded and grinned as they passed out.

"Wall, I reckon maybe he will;" and leaving poor Toppie alone with his smell and melody, he locked the cell door behind them.

"But, how in the world are you able to let me out? How did you know I was here?"

"Wall," young Cheadle said, "I knew you were here because a cuss told me your name, and that you were a Britisher, and

as for how I am able to get you out, it's this way—I happen to be about the biggest bug in the city, do you see? In fact, the city—that is the best part of it—belongs to me, do you see?”

“Well, I hear,” Robert said doubtfully.

“And I don't know whether you happen to be a religious man, and to believe in special providences or not; but I do, and I say that it was just a special providence that brought me into town to-day, for I don't live here; and to-morrow you'd have found me gone—that is, you wouldn't have found me. Now, there's some,” he went on, “as say that they don't believe in special providences. 'Tis clear to me that they cannot have been long out West. If they'd been long out here, bless you, they're bound to change their mind.

Special providences,” he said, with some of the scorn that familiarity breeds; “why, the country’s fairly crawling with them; you’ve seen one already. If you’re here a month or two, you’ll get quite used to them before you get home.”

CHAPTER V.

MR. CHEADLE AS A FINANCIER.

THE Semite is seldom reproached with lack of financial prudence or inability to look after his own interest, which is proverbially high. His features, especially the most salient one, suggest a prehensile, accipitral character. He is quite able to take care of himself, and of a good deal of what belongs to others, too. In the tents of the Aryan, the Semite is able to find himself more than at home.

But there are exceptions. We are told,

on good authority, that there are no Jews in Aberdeen. The Aberdonian has been tried and found wanting in those qualities which are dear to the prehensile, accipitral character. The Semite values far more highly a warm heart than a hard head—in others. But in this the Aberdonian disappoints him; and it is, therefore, that there are no Jews in Aberdeen.

Now, Mr. Cheadle was an Aberdonian; but he had qualities other than Aberdonian. He had all the cunning, but none of the carefulness which has made Aberdeen a barren fig-tree to the Semite. While good Mrs. Cheadle lived, he had done well; for he had come from small beginnings. On an average Mrs. Cheadle had been wont to call him “fool” half a dozen times daily; and, on an average,

she had been right. It doubtless was this that had made Mr. Cheadle so fiercely fond of her. She called him "fool," she checked his enthusiasms; and he recognised that she was right. He loved her terribly—so terribly that he could not bear to see her dole away even half an ounce of love to their son. He was intensely jealous of Mrs. Cheadle's love of him; and when Mrs. Cheadle died it grew even worse. For the affection that she had been used to show the son, was ever so much magnified in Mr. Cheadle's retrospect. A few years are a very distorting medium, particularly if the mind always keeps going the same way, and consistently shapes the lens to a certain angle.

So when Mr. Cheadle had no longer

any one to call him "fool" a sufficient number of times a day, he began to get into trouble.

The battle for existence seems immortal in man. Its end will be merged in the fight of Armageddon. Only, from age to age, the weapons change. Once it was the stone age ; then the iron age. We have nearly made an end of the gunpowder age ; we are coming to the money age. Money is the weapon now, although it is often also the guerdon ; but this is only according to old custom. We fought for the enemy's flint arrow heads, for his glaive of battle and his coat of mail, for his cannon and his fortress ; now we fight him with money, and for money, that so we may strengthen the sinews of further war.

And Mr. Cheadle was a lover of

the battle. Physically, however, he was a man of peace. His ways were not the ways of the age of gunpowder. He was highly evolved. Colonel Burscough was in the gunpowder age—fearfully combustible. But Mr. Cheadle would fight anybody with money, and would probably win. So far he was Aberdonian enough ; but from this point onward, he went on a way of his own—was carved, not turned out of a mould. He did not care a scrap for money when he had got it. He was not aware of this. He fancied that he wanted the money dreadfully, and would do things to get it that were a long way on the dark side of shady ; but directly he had it, he played with it as if it were dross. Before he got it, he had visions of buying up all Aberdeen ; but as soon

as his coups bore fruit, he wasted it. He did not spend it on himself, directly or indirectly; but he wasted it in fighting more battles, playing in other Companies, loving the battle the better the heavier the odds against him.

It was only after the inauguration of the Fish Company that Pebblecombe found out the respect, not unmixed with suspicion, with which Mr. Cheadle's talents were viewed in the City. For he was a perfectly free lance. You could not tell which side he would take, or where he might help, or where thwart. He was that very rare product, an utterly unprincipled man. One-principled men, such as Lord Morningham, are often called unprincipled, and the earth is fairly crowded with them; but

a really unprincipled man cares neither for any other, nor for himself; and this is rare. There are moods of desperation in which we are all so temporarily, but the men who go through life consistently, without a principle, are hard to catch. As a rule they are very clever; and Mr. Cheadle was horridly clever. He was not a really good man of business. He had too big a head for that. In a big head there is room for ideas, and in business you do not want ideas. They get in the way of facts. The Semites had the heads of men of business—low receding foreheads and keen hard eyes—very keen-sighted, so far as they went, and not going far enough to be bothered by “atmosphere” or distance that merged into dreamland.

Mr. Cheadle had the acquisitive faculty, but not the faculty of keeping his acquisitiveness. And all the spare faculty that in a perfectly balanced little business head is used for keeping, with Mr. Cheadle seemed to be used in acquiring. He was the most generous man out of a work-house. He would lend you, give you, throw at you, a hundred pounds—so long as you were not his son—and immediately would rush with a war-cry into the battle, and tell you that it could not be better invested than in some Company on whose balance sheet Mr. Cheadle exercised his matchless culinary skill, not without perquisites.

Very dear to the hearts of the Semites was Mr. Cheadle when he led them to victory in the van of the Fish Consumers'

Company. They were good men, many of them, excellent fathers, faithful husbands, the love centres of their respective homes ; but it was their heritage, of many generations, to look upon mankind in general as a natural prey, and the Aryan race in particular as a potential gold mine. They would never have given a hundred pounds to any one, or even lent it except at a shocking rate of interest ; but none of them would have been quite so clever at getting it back. They had the keeping faculty, the faculty of hoarding—not in a miserly way that starved the good money and made it barren, but in a way which made it bring forth a seven, a ten, even a fifteen per cent. ; but they were not quite a match for the Aberdonian.

When Mr. Cheadle rose at the board

table of the Metropolitan Fish Consumers' Company, the atmosphere of that barely furnished office grew pleasanter. His very manner threw a softening, mellowing, humanizing glow over the crude tones of the room, and poetry over the crude figures and *£. s. d.* For that was where Mr. Cheadle differed from his board companions—he was human first, and financier afterwards—they were financiers first, and human with difficulty ever. They financed for love of money; he financed for love of financing—that is, of fighting.

Such, as a rule, was the composition of the board. To prove the rule, there was an exception. Of the three great names nominated by the signatories of the memorandum of Association, two had been withdrawn. A third remained. He re-

mained, he said, to protect the shareholders' interests. His name was a great one, and once he had been a great man. To-day he should have been in his second cradle ; but he was at the board table of the Fish Consumers' Association. Mr. Cheadle liked his being there. It was a piquancy, an irony, to the situation ; and Mr. Cheadle was able to appreciate it. He addressed himself to the aged child who bore the great name, and the Semites hearkened ; as in a mixed company one often talks to a child and the rest listen, amused. The irony is similar. But when the child is an aged one, the situation has also pathos.

One day the aged child came primed with business. A shareholder had asked him whether he were present at the

board meeting at which the cheque of £7500 to the promoters had been signed. He was full of zeal to ask why he had not received notice of the board meeting at which this cheque was signed. The chairman replied that there had been no board meeting for this purpose. The cheque had been signed by two directors, which, under the articles of association, was all that was requisite. The aged child apologised, thanked the chairman, and became a cipher.

“I would ask our worthy managing director,” the chairman of the board then said, looking at Mr. Cheadle, “to inform us as to the progress since the last meeting.”

Mr. Cheadle turned towards the aged child and said, “Mr. Chairman and gentle-

men,—I am happy to be able to report to you that our progress is strikingly satisfactory. Our carts are going about the metropolis conveying excellent fish to our customers. We have been very successful in making contracts with the masters of various fishing fleets. In short, our business is in a fair way to become very extensive indeed. But,” he continued, sinking his voice ominously, “there is, in certain quarters an element of distrust, or of pretended distrust, which is sad to see. There is a certain ‘cave,’ if I may borrow a Parliamentary expression, among the shareholders. These ‘cave-dwellers,’ who are principally of the legal profession,” said Mr. Cheadle, with a humorous melancholy, “have taken upon themselves to disapprove of the action of the general

body of the shareholders in voting, as is customary in all such cases, a sum of money to the promoters of this Association which is likely to be so great a boon to the metropolis. I hear that a meeting has been held with the view of protesting against this action on the part of the shareholders. Their object, gentlemen, is, I am afraid, but too patent. It is, doubtless, to wreck this Association—to strangle it in its infancy—from which they hope to get much profit in the shape of the legal fees incidental to its winding up ; or, failing that, to get themselves appointed on the directorate of the Association. What is even worse,” continued Mr. Cheadle, striking a yet lower note of sadness, “their pretended mistrust extends even to a member of the Church. They

are striving to throw suspicion on the motives of a clergyman named the Reverend Mr. McWhat, who, you may remember, obtained a large number of proxies with the intention of voting against the payment of promotion money. Happily, the Reverend Mr. McWhat became convinced in time of the error of his intended illiberal action, and threw the entire weight of his proxies into the overwhelming majority by which the shareholders generously showed their appreciation of the exertions of the promoters of the Association. Having seen his mistake in time, the Reverend Mr. McWhat made the most honourable reparation in his power; but what," asked Mr. Cheadle, in a glow of righteous indignation, "do these pettifogging men of the law not venture

to ascribe to him?—the most shocking perfidy, the most deliberate deceit! They even say that he was acting at the instance of certain of the promoters!”

The aged child looked inexpressibly shocked. The Hebrew countenances expressed a well-assumed reflection of his feelings, blended with a most genuine admiration of Mr. Cheadle's oratory.

“I need hardly say, gentlemen,” Mr. Cheadle resumed, “that it is my firm conviction that they will find none to believe them. We may, perhaps, dismiss it from our attention.”

“Especially,” added the chairman, *sotto voce*, “as the money is safely paid.”

“By the way,” observed Mr. Cheadle,

carelessly, as the meeting was about to dissolve, "I think it would be well to make a second call—say, on preference shares only—shortly."

"Oh yes, certainly," said the chairman, "for what date shall we say—the 18th?—we do not wish to hurry the shareholders. Will you propose the resolution?" he said to the aged child.

Mr. Cheadle drafted the resolution. The aged child read it tremulously. A Hebrew gentleman seconded it. It was carried unanimously. The secretary entered it in the minutes. The meeting broke up; and the aged child went home to its cradle to prattle of the important share it had taken at the board meeting. And so it had.

"It won't mean much money that

second call," Cheadle said to the chairman ; "but it will prevent those who don't pay from giving any vote against us. Our supporters don't have preference shares, only ordinary ; they'll be all right."

"Cheadle," said the chairman fervently, "you are a genius. But, tell me, how do you get all our information about the movements of the enemy ?"

"It's most simple," said Mr. Cheadle ; "I have a friend—a poor dependent—whom I have befriended. In fact, he owes me money. I dressed him in a suit of clothes, and sent him to the meeting of the disaffected shareholders. His present name is Captain Conynghame. I call him Slybacon. Eh ! eh ! cunning-ham, slybacon—a poor jest, but my own. The

name fits him. He is one of the enemy's most trusted counsellors."

"Cheadle," said the chairman, in a yet more fervent strain of encomium, "you ought to have been a Jew."

CHAPTER VI.

HOW YOUNG CHEADLE'S FORTUNE "BOOMED."

To do Mr. Cheadle, senior, justice, he had not started his son in America quite as badly as he had supposed. It had not cost much. A bit of land, with some stock on it, in a remote part of the States, had come to Mr. Cheadle by way of payment of a bad debt contracted in one of his financial games. The title-deeds were a little doubtful, perhaps; but he did not tell his son that, as he sent him off, with them and his blessing, to his patrimony. Most men would soon have

become "dead beats" under such disadvantages of ignorance of the country as young Cheadle possessed. But young Cheadle prospered. Nobody questioned the title-deeds, and his sheep were prolific. His ranche was not far, as distances go in the States, from the city of San Chiquito.

One fair time he drove his lambs to the city. He arrived three days too soon, but saw a nice watered paddock where his sheep, which seemed dry in the gullet and panting, might refresh themselves. He went to the man who owned the field, and asked him for how much he would rent it out for three days. The man said "200 dollars," and young Cheadle said "Good afternoon." Then he started prospecting all round the city, but could not find another field at all to

his purpose. So he came back to his sheep. They were thirsty and panting as before—only more so. He was in despair. He went to the man who owned the watered field, and said, "Did you mean that price you named for three days' rent of your field?" The man said, "Why, certainly." Young Cheadle was very angry. He would sooner have died or, what was worse, have seen all his sheep die, than give the man 200 dollars for the rent of the field. But he thought he would surprise him on a different proposition. He said to the man, "Say, what's your price to buy?" "Buy," said the man; "who talks about buy?" "I do," young Cheadle said. The man at length, very reluctantly, committed himself by naming a sum about three times

the field's value. The moment he had named it, he regretted he had not multiplied it first. Young Cheadle named another sum a good bit lower. Then they fought till they met about half way, and the field became young Cheadle's property.

It took all the money he made in the fair, and a good deal over, which he had to leave on mortgage, at a very severe rate of interest, on his ranche of the dubious title-deeds. But the Statute of Limitations had freed him by that time. He went back and worked on his ranche, and thought very little of his field near the city.

So, young Cheadle, whom Robert now saw in virtuous enjoyment of the results of many a "boom," thus fell

into the unenviable financial position of a "dead beat." He had not a red cent. But he had what the wisdom of all sages and copy-books affirms to be better—a friend. This friend was known—almost too well-known—throughout the saloons and the store, which then composed the city of New London (close to which was young Cheadle's ranche), as Hairtrigger Jack.

There was no reproach in the sobriquet. It did not indicate that Hairtrigger Jack would take an unfair advantage of a fellow-creature—any more, at least, than any other law-abiding citizen of New London. It simply meant that, in the language of the country, "he shot on sight." If a man questioned his integrity or any other of his social virtues, he shot

that man forthwith, without troubling about any such preliminaries as telling him to "throw up his hands," or give explanation of his words. That was not Hairtrigger Jack's way; and it was just this little trait of quick decision of character which his sobriquet felicitously indicated. Hairtrigger Jack was a good friend; but, unfortunately, the position of his own finances for the moment left much to be desired. His "pile" consisted of ten dollars, while Robert could but contribute to their joint stock a little grey mare, who had been timed to run half a mile at very quick speed.

With ten dollars, backed by the best will in the world, one can do but little for a friend who is "dead-broke."* But with

* "Dead-beat" is a substantive. Its adjectival

a little grey mare, timed to run half a mile fast, one may go far.

As kindly fortune willed it, it was unnecessary, in this critical position of things, to go further than some 150 miles, in order to turn to account the speed of the little grey mare. It is 150 miles across the desert from New London to Belleville, and at Belleville were some running races fixed for an early date. They would match the little grey mare to run half a mile against anything that could be found in Belleville. Hairtrigger Jack should ride the mare, for young Cheadle was no disciple of Archer.

There was no railway in those days. There was something patriarchal in the

form is not "dead-beat," or "dead beaten," but "dead-broke."

traversing of the desert by young Cheadle, Hairtrigger Jack, the little grey mare, and the ten dollars.

Ten dollars is not a large capital on which to base a fortune, as the result of a single match in a country, where all stakes, as among gentlemen, are put up beforehand. But our friends bore brave hearts and level heads. They were not at all dismayed by the smallness of their capital.

On nearing Belleville they agreed to separate. Their modes of entry into the town were widely different. Hairtrigger Jack rode in in all the glory of the little mare and his ten dollars. Jim Cheadle arrived on foot with but a dollar in his pocket, which he had borrowed in New London at a cent. per cent. rate of

interest, which, considering the nature of the security, seemed to show that public feeling in New London was even then kindly disposed towards young Mr. Cheadle.

Hairtrigger Jack did a good deal of talking in Belleville, and his chief topic was the little grey mare. Young Cheadle took no interest in the matter. To one or two citizens of Belleville, who asked him whether he knew Hairtrigger Jack, since they both came from the same city, he replied carelessly, "Know him by name well enough." Asked if he knew anything of the little grey mare, he said "No ; that he took no interest in racing." Asked, "What sort of a man is this Hairtrigger Jack, any way ?" he replied, "Oh, soft, softish !"

This was enough for the citizens of Belleville. Yielding to considerable pressure, Hairtrigger Jack consented to make a match—the little grey mare to run a half mile against the pride of Belleville.

He said he did not care about gambling any way. He would not bet more than ten dollars.

There was some dissatisfaction in Belleville when he named the figure of the stakes. Every citizen wanted a hand in it, till the claim of each panned out exceeding small. Some little trouble then arose to find a stakeholder agreeable to both parties. To each one named, Hairtrigger Jack objected that it was the first time he had ever heard of him. At length an inspiration fired one of the crowd.

"Why," said he, "there's a man in Belleville comes from your town, says he knows you by name; so maybe you'll know him—Cheadle."

"Cheadle," said Jack doubtfully. "I do know him by name, certainly. I don't have the pleasure of his personal acquaintance. Still, I never heard any man say a word against his character. Yes, gentlemen," he said, brightening up as he made his decision—while a great sense of relief filled Belleville, that the last obstacle was overcome — "I'm agreeable that Mr. Cheadle shall hold the stakes."

Hairtrigger Jack and Cheadle were suitably introduced by a leading citizen of Belleville. Hairtrigger Jack put up his ten dollars, which were pocketed by Cheadle, while the Belleville representa-

tive handed a similar sum to the same gentleman.

Hairtrigger Jack's capital would appear to have been now exhausted, but in a short while he came to Cheadle with twenty dollars in his hand, saying he had found a man who wished to back his mare.

Hairtrigger Jack was at no personal trouble to bring up to the stakeholder the man who should cover this stake. About that there was no difficulty. Like fly-catchers on a rail awaiting the passing "bug,"—every loafer at the bar which young Cheadle affected kept his dollars on hand for a chance of speculation against the grey mare. The twenty were promptly met by the putting up of a similar advance on the part of Bellevilleites.

But a short while elapsed before Hair-trigger Jack was again along—this time with forty dollars, which he had been asked to put up in favour of the grey. This advance, likewise was eagerly responded to. All through the day Hair-trigger Jack kept calling in on young Cheadle at the chief saloon with a commission to back the mare for varying, but constantly increasing sums, until some five or six hundred dollars in all were staked on the result.

Speculation was finally brought to a close by an inability, not on the part of the backers of the mare, but on the part of Belleville to meet the stakes put up on the mare's behalf. Such a change was rarely seen; and what seemed yet more remarkable, though in the growing

excitement it passed almost without observation, none of Hairtrigger Jack's backers had put up their stakes in person, but had all commissioned the staking of them to the supposed owner of the mare.

A portion of the transactions between Hairtrigger Jack and the stakeholder, which neither of them mentioned to the citizens of Belleville, consisted in the transference from the pocket of the latter to that of the former, of the amount of the stakes, as they were from time to time deposited. It necessarily followed from this arrangement that the amount of money actually held by young Cheadle at the close of speculation was less by almost one-half than the nominal amount for which he was responsible; for the money which Hairtrigger Jack kept

putting up as a fresh stake consisted entirely—save for his original ten dollars—of stakes previously put up by the citizens of Belleville. Young Cheadle was little troubled, however, by the deficiency on the credit side of his account, for he had no doubt whatever of the grey mare's success.

The race was run.

Hairtrigger Jack had some difficulty in not winning by more than five or six lengths.

As soon as he passed the judge's box he rode up to the stakeholder, and, with his pistol hand behind him, received the stakes, without dismounting, with his left. He said very few words of good-bye to the people of Belleville—though several leading citizens requested him

to look in at the saloon—and rode away across the desert, with his head over his shoulder, in the direction of New London.

Young Cheadle had trouble in convincing the inhabitants of Belleville that he had had no previous acquaintance with Hairtrigger Jack ; but the fact that he had paid over the stakes, and the threatening attitude of the winner of the race towards him, when he attempted a show of delay in the matter of payment, told strongly in his favour ; though in point of fact this last little piece of comedy had been carefully preconcerted. Towards night-fall he might have been seen trudging across the desert to a rendezvous agreed on between himself and Hairtrigger Jack.

Hairtrigger Jack was not there, however.

Young Cheadle waited long, and said many things, but he did not come; nor when after four days and nights of foot travelling Cheadle arrived, almost starving—a “dead-beat,” physically as well as financially this time—at New London, had anything been there seen of his estimable fellow-citizen.

In fact, not from that day to this had young Cheadle or anyone else in New London set eyes upon him, or upon the little grey mare, or upon those dollars which he promised, with a pathetic earnestness which was almost fearful, to divide fair and square with his friend and partner. Partnership with Hairtrigger Jack was not destined to be the means by which young Cheadle should rise to fortune.

But fire came down and burned the

city of San Chiquito ; and at its rebuilding it seemed good to the authorities—for reasons which were patent to everybody's nose—to move a little farther westward. All the world moves West. Young Cheadle said that most of his nose had moved West. And one effect of the moving of the City of San Chiquito was to bring the main street of the City right along a stretch of the field which young Cheadle had made a fool of himself in buying.

So that, at the time at which Robert in prison heard his cheery whistle of "the Braes o' Mar," (like King Richard, the lion-hearted, and his faithful troubadour) he was getting a yearly rental of some five times the amount of the original purchase money—notwithstanding that

that amount was exorbitantly large. And in that manner he came to be a man of substance, and of first-rate importance in San Chiquito.

When Robert had succeeded in convincing his liberator of his true share in the horse-stealing, young Cheadle went with him to the judge, who acquitted him without a stain on his character. It then became a question about the fate of that unfortunate miner "now languishing in prison," Mr. Toppie Johnson. Their captors were summoned to the judicial presence, and after some parleying agreed to compound their vendetta for the not exorbitant sum of twenty-five dollars. Robert paid the fine, and Mr. Toppie Johnson left San Chiquito, as lightheartedly as he had entered it.

On the following day, Cheadle and Robert, after telegraphing to Mr. Fleg, went *by train* to New London—such is the development of the country!—where horses were waiting to take them to the ranche. The country was marked off with small white surveyors' stakes, doubtless in anticipation of a "boom," which, though partially realized, had naturally failed to keep step with the enterprising imagination of these children of the West. The sight of these surveyors stakes led young Cheadle into a vein of moralizing, in which he gave a masterly diagnosis of the epidemic so familiar in the Western States by the name of "boom." The most striking and typical symptom of a "boom" is a feverish desire on the part of its victim

to become possessed of real estate, with the avowed or latent object of speedily disposing of it at a considerable advance on the purchase money to another of the victims. The disease reacts in a peculiar manner upon itself, for since the authorities have instituted no system of quarantine to prevent its contagion, and the "boom" exerts a fatal attraction over a practically unlimited area, it follows that the greater the "boom" the more people pour into the country, and the more people flock into the country the greater the "boom."

The origin of the disease is in many cases very obscure, so much so that young Cheadle, who in pathology would probably have been an advocate of the "germ" theory, was inclined to suspect

the "boom" of a physical, atmospheric or even diabolic origin. In the present case, however, it was founded on the hopes of railway extension.

The disease is fed by the payment of money, or by the promise to pay; and it is to those afflicted in the latter form that it is apt, when the crisis comes, to be most fatal. To some few of its survivors it appears to have been of positive benefit—to have cleared out the constitution, as it were; but of the majority it does but clean out the pockets, and leave them "dead broke" in such direct proportion to the virulence of the attack, that we may financially paraphrase a mathematical formula, and say that "'booms' and 'dead-beats' are equal and opposite."

Such, inadequately transcribed, was

young Cheadle's diagnosis of the fatal epidemic known as "boom."

Young Cheadle's ranche and house were on a scale which is seldom seen, and is year by year becoming rarer. In the days of his prosperity, he had added vastly to his original inheritance.

The house itself covered a deal of space, for it was but one storey high. It was raised from the ground on stone foundations—the roof of tiles of a very bright red, finely burnt by the Mission Indians many years before. The house and offices were built round a large court or quadrangle. A double set of stairways led from the road to a verandah, running along the front of the house, and as you sat in the shade of this verandah, you looked out over the prettiest little garden

imaginable, with vineyard and orchard beyond. And when your eye ranged farther, far as ever you could see, spread the exquisitely delicate green of the alfilleria, an annual which is a species of wild geranium, but which affords pasture of a very fattening quality when fresh, and when dry forms on the ground a natural hay, upon which stock may be supported until the dry season is over. It is a wonderful provision of kind Nature.

The morrow of their arrival was to Robert a day to be remembered. It was his first sight of the breaking-in to the saddle, in the Mexican manner, of selected members of the herds of semi-wild horses which ranged on young Cheadle's ranche. On these large ranches the geldings are divided into bands, or "caponaras," of

some sixty head. Each band is under the leadership of a certain "bell" mare with whom the colts have been associated ever since weaning-time; and it is remarkable how attached they grow to their own particular "bell" mare, evincing the greatest wish to rejoin her if separated from her, though taking not the slightest notice of the "bell" mares of other bands. And what is yet stranger—not merely a fancy of the natives, but a well established fact—colts who are separated from the mare to whom they have been accustomed will far more readily follow a white, or nearly white mare, than one of any other colour.

The bands from which selection for breaking was to be made had been driven the previous day into a large pasture-field,

just beyond the vineyard. Soon after dawn, the men were at work parting out from these bands those immediately broken to the saddle, any sickly specimen being left for a future time. The selected geldings were then driven off, under the charge of an old "bell" mare, into a strong enclosure, or corral, in the shape of a square of some hundred feet aside. They would be kept with this same "bell" mare for some time in enclosed pastures, in order that when again turned loose on the ranche these broken, or "gentle" horses, as they are termed, might be in one band together, instead of running wild with uncultured associates.

Now the real business is about to commence. The gate of the corral is closed. There is a pause of a few moments (while

the majordomo casts his eye around to see that all is in order and readiness), which gives Robert time to appreciate the features of the scene before him. In one corner of the corral is a band of terrified geldings, huddled together, and snorting in their fear, apparently "marking time," and treading on one another's toes as they attempt with monotonous persistence to push their way through the wall of the corral. Near the gate of the corral, sit the Mexicans upon their horses, calm and unimpressionable, continuously smoking cigarettes, slowly drawing out and adjusting their long raw-hide "riatas" or lassoes. On the fence of the corral sits the "bronco" rider.

"Bronco" rider, or "wild" rider, is the name given to those younger men who

do the rougher work of first backing the unbroken horses. His stock-in-trade consists of a pair of long spurs, with enormously spiked rowels. From the spurs hang small chains, with weights attached, whose use will be very shortly apparent. The next article of the equipment is a strong saddle with horn and high cantle, and broad horse hair "sinch," or girth. Finally a raw-hide halter and reins, to which halter, or "jacamoro," is attached a strip of leather for blindfolding the horse which is to be broken.

With a glance around him of searching scrutiny, though veiled beneath an assumption of nonchalance, which is a national characteristic, the majordomo assures himself that all is in good order. "Bueno," he says, half in soliloquy, then

walks his horse into the middle of the corral, whirls his "riata," with its fatal noose, twice or three times round his head, and with merely a graceful turn of the wrist, wherein is all the perfection of the art which conceals art, despatches the noose flying through the air, to fall lightly as a well-thrown salmon-fly over the neck of the gelding which he has selected as the first victim.

Involuntarily, an admiring "bravo!" escapes Robert's lips, greatly to the surprise, and somewhat to the scorn of those around, to whom such an exhibition of skill is of everyday occurrence.

And now a battle royal commences. The noosed gelding plunges in his terror into the midst of his scarcely less terrified companions, as the hooked salmon makes

for the deep water. So, like a skilful fisherman, the majordomo gives the horse line, always however keeping on him a steady strain—now lifting high the “riata” to clear his own horse’s head, now throwing it with a sudden movement to one side or other, to avoid the rush of this horse or that of those who crowd around their noosed companion. Gradually the victim is separated from the band. The majordomo is able to take a turn or two of his “riata” round the horn of the saddle. His own horse, traitrously renouncing, under the over-mastering kingship of man, all natural ties of affection with the equine race, aids him by keeping himself braced, with fore-legs extended, and ever with his head towards the captive. For captive he almost is. The capitulation is at hand.

Still he hangs back, but more by the dead weight of his body than by active exertion of his muscles. Once or twice he makes a strange choking in the throat. He reels, and then down he goes upon his side, to all appearance dead.

Now the "bronco" rider slips down off his perch. Quickly he adjusts the blind and the "jacamore," and the poor horse, stupefied, blindfolded, and exhausted, stands up, at length, under the stimulus of repeated kicks. The saddle is put on and secured, the "sinch" being drawn cruelly tight. The blind is now lifted, the "riata" being still around the horse's neck, and he exercises what strength remains to him in trying to "buck" or kick the saddle from his back. During these vain antics the majordomo, assisted

by the other horsemen, coaxes or drives him out from the corral, where, upon the deep sand of the bank of a river, which runs through the ranche, the poor beast is again choked, until it submits to having the blind replaced over his eyes.

After much patting of the saddle and the application of some vile terms in Spanish, the "bronco" rider leaps into his seat. He leans forward, slips off the riata, and undoes the blind. Simultaneously with this, two assistants on horseback rush up behind with screams and whistling of their "riatas" through the air. Now, too, we see the use of the little chains and weights attached to the spurs, for the "bronco" rider has thrown these chains over the spikes of his rowels, so that they do not revolve, and digging them into the

"sinch," has a heel-grip which defies every manœuvre of the horse, save the not uncommon one of lying down upon the sand. This, of all possible modes of behaviour on the horse's part, is the least to be desired. If he buck, that is better than lying down and sulking; but his usual conduct is to set off at a gallop. Then, when he is thoroughly exhausted, his neck is pulled this way and that, he is turned to the right and to the left, and is eventually unsaddled and released to meditate upon the vanity of equine wishes in the field in which the whole band is enclosed, until each member of it has several times undergone this process.

The majordomo had led off with the first captive, but no sooner was his especial victim separated from the rest than another

man commenced the early stages of the process with another horse. All through the day the work went on. There were on hand some twenty or so "bronco" riders, and at least twice that number of men on thoroughly trained horses.

It was an interesting but, to Robert, not altogether a pleasing sight. The work seemed rough even to cruelty ; and though perhaps the physical sufferings of the horses scarcely amounted to positive pain, the unquestionably great discomfort must have been tenfold intensified by their frantic terror. This is but one of the several almost equally rough-and-ready methods by which the Mexican breaks the wild horse for his own riding. One is glad to think that the others are, as a rule, less brutal.

CHAPTER VII.

CRICKET—LITTLE PIPKIN *v.* WHITE-CROSS.

OF latter years the cricket in the annual match, Little Pipkin against White-Cross, had not been going at all as Mr. Slocombe could have wished. It was not merely that Little Pipkin had been beaten, but a custom had crept in of asking foreign cricketers—men not in the county even—to take part in the match. The innovation had been commenced by White-Cross, and Mr. Slocombe was liberal enough to admit that White-Cross had had some reason for the step—in fact, that it was

rendered necessary, if the match were to be a match at all, by the overmastering genius of Robert Burscough. So far he even approved of it as a just recognition on the part of White-Cross of Little Pipkin's superiority.

But now Robert was gone. This was the third year that he had been unable to come to the match, for the year before he went abroad an even greater fixture had hindered him, and by the help of foreign allies—men whose names were of note even at Lord's—White-Cross had given Little Pipkin two parlous beatings. This year Colonel Burscough, on the part of Little Pipkin, had written to Lord Morningham as representing White-Cross, proposing, as Robert was abroad, that they should return to the good old ways, and

that the match should again become one of village teams pure and simple.

But Lord Morningham could not agree to this, because, as he said, his guests were already invited. So Colonel Burscough devised a scheme almost Cheadleian in its subtilty, and laid it before the cricket committee of Little Pipkin, in whose eyes it found favour, and they were all sworn to secrecy respecting it.

On the day of the great match Lord Morningham drove over in his dogcart with two of his friends, betimes, and another friend, and the rest of the eleven of White-Cross, in a drag, were not long behind him. When they came out of the dressing-tent the eleven of White-Cross presented a splendour that charmed the eye with the colours of the I. Zingari, Free

Foresters, and M. C. C. adorning the persons of the three imported cricketers ; while the appearance of the eleven of Little Pipkin was of pure, unrelieved rusticity. But some of the men of White-Cross began to ask one another who was that rustic with the long legs and the hat pulled over his eyes ; and who that one with the stout legs ? There was also a third who was a stranger to them, but he escaped general notice because he was of little stature. They asked the men of Little Pipkin who these men were, and some said, quite truly, that they did not know, and others that the strangers had but lately come to the village ; and this again was true, for they had come to it but the night before.

White-Cross won the toss, and Lord

Morningham sat in the pavilion and watched the first of his friends, who was a mighty swiper, go in, and settled himself to see him swipe.

The long-legged stranger rustic began to bowl. At the first ball Lord Morningham whistled after a manner he had when in the pavilion at Lords ; for he affected cricket, as being a popular game, and because he had been the coolest slow bowler for an Eton boy that had ever trundled out a Harrow eleven. But he whistled because the ball went so fearfully near the wicket. To the second ball the batsman played forward carefully, and met it. But the third pitched a trifle shorter, and the batsman, playing forward as before, returned it to the hands of the bowler, where it remained.

The most terrible catastrophes are those that happen most suddenly, and in quick succession the wickets fell of the other two whose names were great at Lords', and they were together in the pavilion explaining to each other the causes of their several downfalls, which they agreed in attributing to luck, and expressed every confidence that, given another trial, they could go on playing that sort of bowling all day long. For the other bowler was the stranger rustic who had escaped general notice by his shortness of stature.

Disheartened by the defeat of their best and brightest, the eleven of White-Cross were all out for twenty-seven, and byes had contributed the most of these.

Then it was the turn of Little Pipkin to go in, and the short stranger rustic and

the stout-legged stranger rustic went to the wickets. And despite all the efforts of the friends of Lord Morningham, whose names were so great at Lords', they were at the wickets still when the luncheon bell rang; and most of this time had been spent by the eleven of White-Cross, assisted by the entire village of Little Pipkin, in hunting for the ball in the hedge of the vicarage glebe, into which these stranger rustics repeatedly hit it. And the telegraph read 137, and that only, for of wickets fallen there was no tale to tell. At the beginning of luncheon the strangers were conspicuous by their absence, but after a short time they came in, no longer in their rustic garb, but in the unclouded majesty of white flannel. And Lord Morningham and his friends at once

recognized them, and gave a shout, for the long rustic was a very famous bowler of the Surrey eleven, and the stout-legged rustic was the best batsman on a mud-wicket in all England (the champion not excepted), and the rustic of short stature was the most brilliant fieldsman of the eleven of Lancashire, and good with bat and ball alike.

Thus had Colonel Burscough schemed Cheadleianly, and accomplished the overthrow of the men of White-Cross and their famous allies; and when they saw by whom they had been defeated they felt no shame and bore no malice, but joined in the laugh against themselves. And in order that none should be able to say that his *ruse de guerre* had disturbed the harmony of the match, Colonel Burscough

with his own voice sang, at the conclusion of the luncheon, that old familiar song of Robert Burscough's composition, which Robert had for years been wont to sing on the occasion of these matches. In case there be any who may not have heard it, it may be said that it went to a well-known and noble tune, "Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys a-marching," and the words ran as follows:—

"What Englishman can dare
 Any pastime to compare
 With the great and grand old manly game we love?
 What sight so sweet to view
 As a wicket hard and true,
 And the fieldsmen kept for ever on the move?

(Chorus).

"Run, run, run, the ball's a-rolling,
 Scarcely to the boundary she'll go;
 And the throwing's getting wild, and the wicket-
 keeper's riled,
 So we'll try to steal another for the throw.

"'Tis a glorious summer day,
 And the umpire's calling 'play' !
 So don't let's sit indoors in the dumps,
 But let's bat like grand old Grace,
 And we'll score the runs apace,
 While the bails sit undisturbed upon the stumps.

(*Chorus*).

"If she pitch a trifle short,
 'Tis the very best of sport
 To cut her clean and crisply to the ropes ;
 If she pitch a trifle far,
 Won't the bowler get a jar
 If to field her, when we drive her back he hopes ?

(*Chorus*).

"Now whate'er you do, play straight,
 For a shooter don't be late,
 And mind not play too early if she bumps ;
 Don't get your leg in front
 And we'll give the field a hunt,
 And be 'not out' at the drawing of the stumps."

(*Chorus*).

In the afternoon the quality and carriage
 folk began to assemble, to watch the

cricket and gossip, and have tea at the Manor House. Colonel Burscough was in great glory, and men of the village of White-Cross began to come over and sit with their friends on the benches, which had been occupied all day by the men of Little Pipkin.

And then came Sybil, Lady Morningham, driving over her pair of ponies. When the villagers of White-Cross recognized her, they gave a loud cheer of welcome that rang round the ground, for it was the first time that she had been among them since her marriage, and they had known her as a little black-eyed thing playing cricket. Those who were near Lord Morningham noticed that he frowned slightly at the enthusiastic reception of his wife. Perhaps he was reflecting that

it did not often occur to him to arouse a similar popular demonstration. But, after all, he was a man to whom the praise of others, save as a means to power, was quite indifferent.

Sybil looked pale, but very queenly, as she accepted the greetings with which all met her. Only her husband did not move, but sat with his eyes fixed upon the cricket, full of thought. Until this day Sybil had not been able to bring herself to re-visit the old familiar haunts. Hitherto she had avoided all the places in which she and Robert Burscough had strolled hand in hand—had “talked with naked heart together.” But she had decided that this should be her re-introduction to them—this day when all the people gathered to see the cricket match would help her to bear it.

A change had come over Sybil since her first year of married life, and a change had come over her husband too. In the first months of their marriage she had been successful in training herself to a sort of moral and mental numbness in which she lived as in a dream. She seemed to be able to stand outside herself and watch herself going through all the frivolities of their London life, feeling as if there were a real self somewhere quite apart from the Lady Morningham whom people courted, and whose brilliant and erratic sayings they quoted; and in this mood she had been able to answer back her husband with coldness for his coldness, with scarcely less effort than his to whom self-repression had become second nature. It was only when he was not cold that she found it almost impossible to bear.

Then, in the second winter after her marriage, a baby was born. Lord Morningham had treated her with unusual consideration. She had more than fulfilled his expectations in her position as his Countess, and he was pleased with her, as with a valet who served him well. Now she was to become the mother of an heir to his estates, title, and position. He had made up his mind to this, so accustomed was he to mould things to his ends. But when the baby was born it was a girl.

Then Lord Morningham began to change. He did not affect to conceal his disappointment, and showed it by a marked aversion to the child, which roused Sybil, in the new pride and strength of her young motherhood, to active resentment. Her own self she had contrived

for a while to benumb, but for this second self, her child, she was keenly sensitive. It was as if, in giving it life, she had given new life to herself too—new life to rebel against the fearful position into which she had come by her own act of deliberate madness.

Sybil was long delicate, and Lord Morningham left her much alone. She did not mind this, but she knew instinctively that her husband's nature was changing. Hitherto she had respected him for the exemplary time-keeping of the clockwork. But disturbing influences were moving which the clockwork could not control. Is it that the devil has a certain claim upon every one of us, that one time or other we must give him our meed of service in his garden of wild oats?

Or is it, that in the perfect teaching of Lord Morningham it had been overlooked that somewhere about in the clockwork was some element of human nature, which is no very noble thing when it gets the upper-hand of all that is divine, and which principles of pure reason, or, as we have called it, clockwork, are not adequate always to direct ?

But the sowing of tares in the devil's garden, which men of wise charity may regard as an evil to be reprobated indeed, but yet not beyond the sphere of pardon in the youthful and hot-headed, becomes a repulsive, very ugly thing in the case of a cold man, like Lord Morningham, who never had been youthful.

Religion may keep a man's heart pure, and art, which is a younger sister of

religion, may perhaps do it; but it seems that there always is a time when theories of cold duty, untouched by any warmth of love, fail utterly.

So it was with Lord Morningham. He threw to the winds all the moral teaching which he had venerated hitherto in practice and in precept, and gave himself up to very evil paths, and Sybil's respect for him became nothing but absolute, scarcely-disguised fear. He began to be infinitely more hateful than ever to her, and often as she pressed her child to her breast, she asked herself how in Heaven's name it would be possible for her, even for the child's dear sake, to work out to its end such a life as she had brought upon herself.

She had come over to Little Pipkin

expecting help in her first re-visiting of it from the people who crowded up and spoke to her. She found, to her surprise, that she hated them all, that she wanted the quiet of the place as she used to know it. Colonel Burscough was genuinely delighted to see her. He had often been "jammed if he could understand why that young lady would never come over to lunch or anything." With some, one might think it was because "they were so mighty grand now they were Countesses"; but that's not the way with her. So the Colonel greeted her in his most gallant manner, which was very gallant; and, at her request, led her away from the people for a walk round the ground.

The people were well amused, as they should have been, with the cricket—three

of the finest professional players in England on Little Pipkin village green, the like of which has not been seen in the memory of man, nor ever will be. But when old Slocombe caught sight of Lady Morningham, his face was a "sicht for sair een," and when she shook him by both hands, the tears stood in his eyes, and he said in a slightly mumbly way, for his teeth were less numerous than when he had taught her cricket, "God bless you, my lady!"

"Slocombe!" said Sybil, reproachfully dropping his two hands, as a punishment, "if you ever call me that again, I'll—I'll—well, I'll never speak to you again; think how dreadful that would be!" she ended, laughing.

"Miss Sybil, then," the old man said.

“That’s the way I always think of ’ee, dearie—countess or no.”

“Bless you, dear old man!” Sybil answered, almost breaking down. “But come away, Colonel, we must not stop Mr. Slocombe’s looking at the cricket.”

The very next day she drove over and called at Slocombe’s house; and there it was, just the same as before, and they sat and talked ever so long over old times—the shells and the pictures of the ship, and the parrot, none of them looking a day older.

But suddenly Sybil started, for the parrot woke up from a brilliant interval of silence, and began gabbling, “Sybil and Robert!” “Sybil and Robert!” as fast as ever he could go. Sybil said, “Oh, do make him be quiet, Slocombe, please.”

So Slocombe put a table-cloth over him, and he mourned in eclipse all the rest of Sybil's visit. And the last thing she did was to pull the cloth off his cage, and say, "Polly, kiss me—forgive me!" and Polly gave a kiss of forgiveness; and Sybil went out with his "Sybil and Robert!" still ringing in her ears.

CHAPTER VIII.

RANCHE LIFE AND A VISIT TO THE MEXICAN REPUBLIC.

ON the third day after the horse-breaking, Mr. Fleg arrived at young Cheadle's ranche. He was full of theories, distilled through the double spectacles, of the future and tendencies of the young West. Some of them drove young Cheadle to set "the Braes o' Mar" to their gloomiest time. But, on the whole, Mr. Fleg supplied infinite amusement. On the morning of his arrival, he set his boots outside his bedroom door, expecting, it would seem,

a knock, and "Boots, sir; hot water, sir;" in the morning. In the morning one boot was still there; the other could not be found. The establishment was questioned in vain, till a bright thought struck Ah Sin, the Chinese cook. "Me sabee, me see littly dog; him catch heapy boot in him mouth." A puppy dog had eaten it. Luckily Mr. Fleg had another pair.

This Chinaman was a curiosity. He had cut off his pigtail, thinking thereby to make himself a Caucasian. Now, a Chinaman without a pigtail is a Hamlet with no Prince of Denmark—a bird of Paradise with no tail. Ah Sin was not welcomed to the Caucasian bosom, nor in his decaudalated condition would his Celestial countrymen have any of him; so he came out to young Cheadle's ranche, where he

cooked excellently, and made an honest income by playing poker with more skilful sleight of hand than any other on the ranche.

Young Cheadle and Mr. Fleg lived in a chronic war of words, the former propounding concrete objections to the latter's deferential generalisations. After a while, Robert began to weary of his perpetual umpireship, and expressed a yearning to seek adventure in the Republic of Mexico. Young Cheadle endeavoured to dissuade him.

"You'll get shot, sure," he said.

This made Robert all the more eager. He had not yet seen half the shooting he had expected of California.

"You shall have the worst horse I've got," Cheadle said further.

Robert replied that he would not look him in the mouth, so, mounted on rather a sorry Rosinante, Robert, to the bedimming of the double spectacles, started southward. Young Cheadle watched him till he was out of sight, with "the Braes o' Mar" attuned to a grievous pibroch.

"He'll get shot, sure," he said, as he turned into the house to contradict Mr. Fleg's propositions about the value of human life.

After crossing a stream called the Sweet Water, Robert rode all day without meeting a soul, over a country destitute of cultivation, and of the poorest and most desolate aspect. He followed a tolerably defined track, leading away from the coast-line; and towards sunset struck a settlement of some half dozen houses, of which

the chief was a shanty, comprising a liquor saloon, grocery store, and billiard room. Adjoining the saloon were a boarded corral and a stack of hay. He succeeded in making himself sufficiently understood to get permission to turn out his horse in the corral, and give him some of the hay. He left his saddle-bags and blankets strapped to the saddle, which, with the bridle, he hung on the fence. He took his gun with him to the verandah of the house.

The company at supper were sad-looking ruffians. They spoke Mexican Spanish, so Robert was debarred from the enjoyment of their conversation. The moon was brilliant; and through the open door the horses cropping the grass in the corral could be plainly seen. Then, to his sur-

prise, one of the party addressed him in fair English.

"Where did you get that horse?" he asked, referring to the beast that young Cheadle had lent him.

Robert told him, mentioning the name of the owner.

"Cannot be," the other rejoined. "This man"—pointing to one who looked, if possible, a blacker ruffian than the rest—"this man says the horse is his, and that it was stolen from him last year."

Robert intimated, as politely as possible, that he thought the gentleman must be under a misapprehension.

This answer was interpreted to the claimant of the horse, who merely shrugged his shoulders with an air of injured innocence that was pathetic to witness. His

comrades, however, commenced tracing the horse's brand in gigantic outline upon the sand, and pointing from their pictorial design to the injured innocent, with the view of making Robert understand the brand to be the sign-manual of his ownership.

"You see," said the interpreter, "that is my friend's brand, and all these gentlemen know it well."

It seemed to Robert that he was in the hands of the Philistines. He held his peace, and awaited developments.

Since he said nothing, the interpreter took upon himself the Christian office of mediator. He informed Robert that, seeing that he had been imposed upon, and appeared attached to the horse, the cavalero (denoting his friend) would sell the animal for sixty dollars.

Now Robert was not a particularly brave man, and set a considerable, perhaps exorbitant, value on his life. Nevertheless, he could not so far delude himself as to believe it would be of much weight when put in the balance by these gentlemen of the Republic of Mexico against sixty dollars.

So he laughed to scorn the supposition that he could be possessed of so much wealth ;' and the conference concluded with an ultimatum on the part of the interpreter that on the morrow Robert would be summoned before the incorruptible and inflexible justice of a Mexican law-court, where all these gentlemen would combine to bear against him such overwhelming evidence that he must infallibly lose the horse ; could he not manage to collect

sufficient dollars to square the judge? Robert replied that he could, of course, have no objection to abiding by the laws of the country, and so they left it.

As the parley rather noisily concluded, the door was burst open, and, to Robert's immense astonishment, admitted no less a person than his old friend of a few days' back, Mr. Toppie Johnson. Toppie wore the same general sandiness and cheeriness of aspect as had been his portion in the mining camp on the foot-hills or in the cell of San Chiquito jail. He did not see Robert, who was back in the shade, and the party began in their patois Spanish to put Toppie in possession of the situation. The narrative seemed to strike Toppie as intensely humourous. He laughed and slapped his thighs with satisfaction. But

of a sudden, as the name "Cheadle" came into the story, a shade of serious thought crossed his face. He shifted his position to get a better view of Robert's features; at the same moment he made a slight signal to Robert to keep silence.

Robert, meanwhile, congratulated himself that he had made no rash movement in recognition of Toppie; for Toppie's expression denoted that his mind was occupied with some profound scheme, which Robert trusted might prove of a benevolent nature. It did not appear to Robert that any action on his own part could improve his position. He resolved to wait and see whether Toppie, on whom he reckoned as a friend, would give him a cue.

Soon Toppie left the room, and the rest

of the party clustered round a table set on the verandah, and began playing monté. They had set their table right before the door.

When the game was at its highest, Toppie returned to the verandah. He watched the play for a few minutes, then came indoors, humming a tune, and sat himself down, with his back to Robert's. Presently it began to strike Robert that Toppie's song was going to words which had a personal meaning.

"You'll find a grey mare, boss—rum-ti-tum-tum—in the shade of the haystack—tum-ti-tum-tiddle. She's old, but she's fast—rum tum ti tum tay. I've hitched her up right, with your saddle and bridle. But don't move just yet—rum tum ti tum tay. They're all in the doorway; I'll get

them away. Don't come out till the coast's clear—ri tum ti tum tay. Ri tum ti tum tay. Ri tum ti tum tiddle. If you understand me, drop your hat on the ground, boss—ri tum ti de tiddle—rim ti tum tay.

Toppie's song rose to a climax as Robert's hat banged gratefully on the floor, and the vocalist went out again to the verandah.

The stillness of the fair night was unbroken, save by the liberal profanity of the monté players. All outside was peace. Suddenly three pistol shots fired in quick succession woke the darkness. Toppie's shrill voice was heard screaming for help. All the monté players rushed towards the hubbub ; Robert took a swift look around, then darted to the door. Turning sharp

round the house to the right, he gained the haystack, where, as Toppie had said, he found the grey saddled, bridled, and accoutred. In another moment he was on her back, and galloping through the night for the land of the free, and by morning was across the border, beneath the ægis of the Stars and Stripes.

He was a bit ashamed of himself as he rode up to young Cheadle's house, for he had not gone far in his exploration of the great Mexican Republic, and his host and Mr. Fleg were sitting, ready to receive him with sarcasms, in the shade of the verandah. But young Cheadle, as Robert approached, said never a word. He got up from his chair, and with both hands in his pockets, gazed out at Robert with his head still more and more stuck forward,

till it seemed as if his neck must be telescopic. Then, as Robert reached the steps of the verandah, Cheadle turned to Mr. Fleg, and said, in a dead, solemn voice—

“Say, professor, ef ever you’ll say a word again against special providences and *Deuses ex machinas*, you’ll be no mag better’n an atheist. I tell you, that’s my little grey mare that Hairtrigger Jack thieved off me, six years ago, in Belleville.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE "SLY BACON" PETITION, AND THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES.

A GREAT many of the members of the Pebblecome Club had some small interest in the Metropolitan Fish Consumer's Association, but none of them had anything like so big a stake as Colonel Burscough, who was the largest shareholder in the Association.

The Colonel's honest and simple mind was greatly vexed. Robert was approaching his twenty-fifth birthday, and at that date, by the provisions of his father's will,

he came into his inheritance, and his uncle's guardianship ceased. And this made a considerable difference in the Colonel's financial status. A liberal allowance had been granted him under the will, during his nephew's minority, but this ceased with Robert's twenty-fifth anniversary. He had compounded his pension, and the means of his further livelihood were not very evident. He well knew that Robert would never allow him to feel the sting of poverty. But his pride revolted at the idea of accepting his nephew's bounty, and he made gallant efforts to turn to the best advantage such capital as he had saved.

To this end, he carefully studied all those alluring prospectuses of Limited Liability Companies which are transferred unread

from wise men's breakfast-tables into their waste-paper baskets. In many of these Companies he had invested, whereby he grew constantly poorer in pocket, but was preserved by his naturally sanguine temperament from growing any richer in experience. His capital was at low ebb, and dividends by no means at the flood, when Mr. Cheadle offered what appeared a splendid opportunity for recouping himself for all former losses by this magnificent scheme of the Metropolitan Fish Consumer's Association. So, in implicit reliance on Mr. Cheadle's faith and intelligence, the latter of which at least was quite above suspicion, he had invested in the promising Fish Scheme his little all. It was little to be a man's all, but it was a very good round sum. Colonel Burs-

cough's was by far the richest plum which had fallen into the eager mouths of Mr. Cheadle and the Semites.

Other things being equal therefore, such as irascibility of temperament—which they were not—it was only natural that of all the malcontents at Pebblecombe Colonel Burscough should feel most vexatiously mal-content in the deep and stormy waters in which they were fishing without a bite.

The first blow had been the composition of the Board of Directors, which, as the prospectus set forth, was to be chosen *from* the Board of Administration, whose names were great and good. The public in a generous spirit had supplied the adverb *by*, to supplement the *from*; but the promoters of the Company had not

adopted this idea, but had appointed as directors the names least good and great of those on the Board of Administration. A few good names were put on, but these were a minority, and soon withdrew, leaving but one of the great and the good—and that one was a cipher.

Several Special General Meetings were held, and several resolutions framed for the alteration of the articles, but on each occasion the Board defeated the shareholders, by the discovery of some technical irregularity which had been introduced, not without subtle Cheadleian purpose, by themselves.

The very mention of fish began to throw a profound gloom over the club at Pebblecombe, and Colonel Burscough was said never to allow it at his table, when some

prospect of relief was afforded by a circular, sent to all shareholders by a certain Captain Conynghame at the Company's meetings, where he had always spoken against the Board in a temperately determined way that carried weight. And this is that same Captain Conynghame to whom Mr. Cheadle (though Pebblecombe was far from suspecting their acquaintance) had formerly lent money and nick-named Slybacon.

What the Slybacon circular said was this. That he, Captain Conynghame, had of his own initiative put upon the file of the Court of Chancery, a petition begging the Court to put the Company into liquidation—that is to say, to make an end of the Company altogether, and to give back to the shareholders such portion of the

capital of the Company as might still remain. His circular asked each shareholder to signify approval of this most desirable consummation. Captain Conynghame had always appeared to be a little man of some force of character, and here he had taken a very decided line of his own. Pebblecome was inclined to trust Captain Conynghame because of his quiet confidence of manner; Mr. Cheadle was also inclined to trust him, because he owed Mr. Cheadle money—but then Pebblecome did not know this. It is possible that Mr. Cheadle's faith rested on the solid basis of the two.

Now, Mr. Cheadle, in reviewing the position of the Fish Company had spoken to the chairman as follows:—

“The ordinary shareholder, and the

country shareholder in particular, has no more knowledge of business than a baby. He is unfit to undertake the investment of his own money in anything that needs more careful investigation than Goschen's two-and-a-half consols. But out of them all, it is not impossible that there may be one who is capable of taking a line of his own, and bothering us. Suppose," said Mr. Cheadle tragically, "just suppose anyone were to file a petition for the compulsory winding up of the Company. That would rob us of all we have worked for—supposing that it was successful."

"It would not be successful," said the chairman confidently.

"Perhaps not," Mr. Cheadle said oracularly; "perhaps yes. It depends how

much they have found out—what evidence they could bring. Anyhow, it would be uncomfortable. We should have to answer their affidavits, and in correcting their statements we might have to make others which it would be difficult to establish. That would mean trouble. I am a man of peace, a man of conscience. I do not like perjury—especially when there is a chance of being found out.”

The Semite gentlemen unanimously endorsed Mr. Cheadle’s view. None of them liked perjury ; especially when there was a chance of being found out.

“Then what would you advise, Mr. Cheadle?” the chairman asked. He had confidence in Mr. Cheadle. He knew that when Mr. Cheadle mentioned a difficulty, it was with the purpose of

following it up with a suggestion for overcoming it.

"I think," Mr. Cheadle answered, "that *we* had better arrange at once for the filing of a petition."

"Ah," said the Semites, brightening with intelligent approval.

"You see," Mr. Cheadle went on, "if we arrange for bringing the petition, we can of course arrange that it shall fail, and we shall thus prevent anyone else from bringing a petition."

"And how do you propose to arrange it?"

"I think," said Mr. Cheadle, "that it would be advisable that Captain Conyng-hame should bring it. He is well trusted (and justly so—I trust him myself) by the shareholders. It will come well from him. Also it will divert the attention of

many shareholders from this iniquitous idea of removing the present Directors ; and it will give my friend, Captain Conyng-hame, greater influence than ever in their counsels."

And the suggestion pleased the Semites, and was the *fons et origo* of the great Slybacon circular, which so mightily pleased all at Pebblecombe. Had they known its source, it, maybe, had pleased them less. But, all this while, the sword of Damocles hung over Pebblecombe.

Mr. Cheadle came but seldom, and timed such visits as he paid to the club with skill, so that no one, who was any one—that is to say, no Fish Consumer—saw him. When certain of the starving Ichthyophagi should encounter Mr. Cheadle, Pebblecombe feared for the result. Notably it

feared for him at the hands of Colonel Burscough.

Pebblecombe is without many of the advantages of modern seaside civilization. It is without minstrels from Ethopia, or musicians from the Fatherland. But it has gas lamps. Beneath the uncertain light of one of these—it was Mr. Cheadle's gas, at 5*s.* 6*d.* per thousand—the proprietor of the gas, and managing director of the Fish Consumers' Association, passed a portly figure, which he recognized as Colonel Burscough's.

It was Mr. Cheadle's standing policy to recognize people by the light of his gas, to prove its brilliancy. Therefore, almost instinctively, he said, "How are you, Colonel?"

But the Colonel did not answer or stop,

but walked straight past. And this was the more curious, because the light of the gas lamp was full on Mr. Cheadle's face, but behind Colonel Burscough.

Then Mr. Cheadle walked a little slower, and said, "By Jove," and thought.

Mr. Cheadle was a man of peace, but he was not altogether a coward. He was not so much of a coward as to run away from Pebblecombe, and his fate—to Coventry—but he was sufficiently a coward to be in a hurry to know his fate—whether uttermost Coventry or only a suburb. He could not possess his soul and wait. Of such kind is the cowardice of the suicide.

Therefore, he went to the club at a time when Colonel Burscough was sure to be there. Whatever befell him at the hands of Colonel Burscough, it was morally

certain that no worse measure would be dealt him by another.

Mr. Cheadle came into the smoking-room, and immediately a foolish silence fell. The most silent member became desperately loquacious in a corner ; but the only person who was at all at his ease was Mr. Cheadle. He nodded affably, as he came, to Colonel Burscough. The Colonel said nothing, but his visage showed " Danger," and he looked at Mr. Cheadle as if he were a toad.

" I am so glad to have caught you," Mr. Cheadle said, with the air of having hunted the Colonel, like a rare butterfly, for weeks. " I was waiting to speak to you about the unfortunate Fish Consumers' Association."

" Unfortunate Consumers, you mean, sir," said the Colonel, with stern majesty ;

“not unfortunate Fish. Unfortunately there are no fish.”

“Unfortunate shareholders, let us say, Colonel,” Mr. Cheadle suggested as a compromise.

The Colonel accepted the suggestion, and sealed it emphatically. “Yes, sir,” he said, “jammed unfortunate—jammed unfortunate, to be sure ; yes, jammed.” His voice died away rumbling, like thunder.

Mr. Cheadle waited, with deference, till the thunder stopped. Then he said, “We have been so hampered in our business by the action—how shall I qualify it?—the unwise action, let us say, taken by a section of the shareholders, that it is truly wonderful that we should have been able to do any business at all. Some of them acted, I sincerely believe,” said Mr.

Cheadle, with large-hearted magnanimity, "from motives of perfect integrity. Of business, however, they were lamentably ignorant, and were misled, I fear, by men in the legal profession, whose object throughout appears to have been the wrecking of the Company, and the picking up of the resulting crumbs."

The Colonel was gasping very badly. If something did not happen soon, it seemed as if he must burst.

"By heaven, sir," he said hoarsely; "I believe—I hope—you are the biggest scoundrel unhung."

Mr. Cheadle was a man of peace. He had great moral courage—or no self-respect—the results are sometimes identical. He smiled deprecatingly.

"My dear Colonel," he said.

But the Colonel interrupted him. "Oh, jam it all, sir, don't 'my' me, or 'dear' me, sir. Don't do anything to me; and I want nothing, less than nothing to do with you. Would to heaven I had had less to do with you in the past. This I will do for you, however, if you are not too arrant a coward—I will fight you, sir, crippled as I am, with any weapon you please—with sword or pistol, on horse or on foot."

Mr. Cheadle did not grasp at this means of honourable satisfaction.

"Ah!" he said, in a tone of deep pathos; "ah, it is very sad—it is hard in one's old age, when all one's friends turn against one. It is the penalty of ill success. When you are down, everyone goes against you. Had this Association been given a fair chance, I give you my word

of honour, I believe it would have been a splendid success—a splendid success. Then you would have praised me. Now that it is in difficulties, owing to the interested opposition of certain parties, you ascribe it all to me. You are all against me. I do not blame you, my old friend," Mr. Cheadle continued, with sad magnanimity; "but it is very hard to bear."

Mr. Cheadle stopped. He had made his final appeal. He had only to wait for the verdict.

It was a very touching appeal, and Colonel Burscough was a very soft-hearted man. It might possibly have been successful, saving for one point which Mr. Cheadle, clever as he was, had not appreciated. The Colonel was an Anglo-Indian.

Mr. Cheadle's appeal reminded him irresistibly of the mild Hindoo. He was accustomed to such appeals—so much so that he valued them at their true worth—nothing.

“Yes, sir,” said the Colonel, swelling in wrath. “Your *old* friend. So much so that he is your friend no longer. Your old fool, too—hah!—your jammed old fool. How you must have laughed at me! Yes, sir, and I have deserved it; but, sir,” he went on, with growing emphasis, “I will be fool no longer; no longer your fool at least. My eyes are opened, opened to my own jammed folly, and to your jammed swindling tricks. Yes, sir,” said the Colonel fiercely, “do not interrupt me. I say it again, your swindling tricks. Bring an action for slander, if you like.

Hah, hah ! your character would look well in Court. Jammed old idiot that I have been—to be fooled by you—a miserable, pitiful, little, lying scoundrel like you !”

The Colonel was splendid. His wrath was in all keys. Now it was contemptuous. The next instant it grew volcanic.

“ By heaven !” he exclaimed, and caught the unfortunate man by the collar, in the iron grip of his one hand ; “ you deserve the life shaken out of you, to be crushed under foot like a worm !”

He shook him as a nursemaid shakes a naughty baby. It made Mr. Cheadle quite good. It frightened him rather badly. He seemed likely to be shaken into little pieces. The members present rose to protect his life, when suddenly a change, visible to all, came on Mr.

Cheadle's face. Before, he had been frightened—fairly, wholesomely frightened—for though he was bony and Aberdonian, Colonel Burscough was exceptionally strong. But now Mr. Cheadle's eye grew fixed, his face grew pallid, his jaw dropped, and as the Colonel let go of his collar he gazed, fascinated with horror, in the Colonel's face. One of the Colonel's eyes was coming out at him!

The next instant the eye fell out; it clashed upon the fender. Mr. Cheadle gave a low moan of horror; then turned and fled, like Ulysses, his prototype of many shifts, from the blinded Cyclops. It was a severe shock. He thought he had witnessed a miracle, or at least a catastrophe. He had forgotten that one of the Colonel's eyes was glass.

A member picked up the eye broken, and all expressed commiseration ; but the Colonel bore it with stoicism. He explained that he did not use the eye to see with, only for ornament, and brought out a box full of eyes. He tried on first one and then another, consulting the opinion of the club as to the appearance of each, for one eye differed from another in colour and glory. He chose one which was a nice match for his tie, and went home with the business eye a dark hazel, and much bloodshot with anger, and the "bogus" eye a celestial blue, with a white as clear as a baby's.

CHAPTER X.

VIRGINIA, AND LETTERS FROM HOME.

AFTER enjoying many weeks of young Cheadle's boundless hospitality, Mr. Fleg and Robert made up their minds to pursue their wanderings, and make their way across the continent to Virginia. Robert had to pay a promised visit in that fair country—to see her whom they still called the blind girl, whom the Creature had given his life to save, Miss Elsie Dormer, and they had no difficult task in persuading young Cheadle to accompany them. Business was not pressing on the ranche, and

he had a good foreman, an Englishman, whom he called his agent, and whom he could trust. The man's history was a curious one. He had once been well-to-do in the old country, but the rascality of a man who gave himself out to be his friend had ruined him. He had told the story to them with his own lips as they sat one evening on the verandah. He had seemed loth to speak of it, but young Cheadle had especially insisted, and he had at length yielded, under covenant with his master that the name of the man who had ruined him should remain secret. It was a sad tale of cynical duplicity, and had invested the narrator with a grave air of pathos as he told his bitter wrongs.

Professor Fleg, Robert Burscough, and young Cheadle said farewell to this victim

of a friend's knavery, and having handed over their luggage to the officials, and received brass checks with the name of their destination in return, got aboard the cars, and began to travel Eastward. It was a simple journey, for they had few changes, and the cars were a moving hotel. As they went towards the sunrise, the character of those who got on and off altered. The Western type began to be replaced by one less aggressive, for they were making through the Southern States. Of foreigners, the Irishman was everywhere the same, and ubiquitous; but the Celestial began to yield to the Ethiopian.

Then they came to their journey's end, and went to an hotel in Richmond. Robert called at the address which the blind girl had given him. He asked for

Miss Elsie Dormer ; but she was not at home. But he saw others of the family, who received him with very wide-opened arms, proving that "the blind girl" had not been voiceless in his praise.

"Well, we certainly are pleased to see you!" The dear old Virginian formula, which is on the lips of every host, especially if the guest be an Englishman, was ever in his ears. "But you certainly must go out and see Elsie. She'll be mad if she was to think that you'd been and missed her. She's only some eight hours out, by the cars. You certainly must go to Jacobsville and see her."

"The blind girl" was staying with some relatives in the country. Things were going well financially with the Dormer family, and it was no longer necessary for

her to go out as schoolmarm. So Robert left Mr. Fleg and young Cheadle to entertain one another in Richmond, and started off next day to Jacobsville. The Dormers telegraphed to Elsie that Robert was coming, and at the station he found a hooded buggy, with a black boy driving an uneven pair, a horse and a mule. Out of the buggy peeped the brightest eyes that ever were blind—Miss Elsie Dormer's. She received him with an emotion that was nearly tearful, and he soon got his outlandish "Gladstone" strapped on behind the buggy, and away they went. Away over that most fearful of mundane inventions, a Virginian road; jolting through awful mud holes, rattling over loose-laid wooden bridges with no rail, dashing through streams which had no bridge,

while the water poured in over the floor of the buggy ; past patches of Indian corn, with here and there a darkey cabin, open-doored, and giving a glimpse of an old white-haired darkey (the most venerable thing on earth) sitting spinning. Each cabin, however humble, had a lightning conductor, and a dog which barked at the buggy, and several pigs which led the life of lotus-eaters (though their food were the chinkapins which make their hams so sweet) and almost declined to stir from their basking in the road to let the buggy pass. Overhead the great turkey buzzards floated in vast circles, and the katydids "skreeked" in the locust trees.

All these wonders "the blind girl" pointed out to Robert, and spoke of them with the affection of an intense home love.

“And that,” she said, indicating a blue mountain-top, “is Peter’s Mountain. We will go up there some day.”

So they went along, with many a laugh at the joltiness of the road, each laugh answered by the black driver boy with a turn of a grinning head that showed splendid rows of ivories. Then the harness broke (a very frequent incident of Virginian driving) as the buggy came with a jerk out of a burn-bed, and they had to possess their souls in patience while it was tied together with cord.

But at last they reached the house, after Robert had exhausted almost every epithet of artistic praise on the many beauties of nature in flora and fauna. A gateway led them into an orchard, in which, between the fruit trees, the horses and mules were

grazing ; and, nearer the house, the turkeys were running after the gaudy-coloured butterflies, and under the verandah all the family were drawn up in welcome.

What a welcome it was, that first Virginian welcome !

“ But his friends ! Had he come alone ? ”

“ No ; he had two friends awaiting him in Richmond.”

“ In Richmond ? Why, they must come out here, of course.”

And when Robert made some excuse for declining this, which he could not but regard as an excess of hospitality, “ Why can’t they come ? ” the host asked. “ Have they business ? ”

“ No, but—— ”

“ ‘ No, but ! ’ ” he echoed. “ We can

have no 'no, buts.' Tom," he said to a son, "won't you ride into Jacobsville and send a telegram, and tell them they must come? What's their address?"

So Robert was persuaded to write out a telegram, while Tom selected a saddle and bridle from the heap lying handy in the porch, and put them on the first horse that let himself be caught, and started at a gallop for Jacobsville.

The following afternoon Mr. Fleg and young Cheadle arrived, and in an hour or two felt as if they had known the family for years. The days passed smoothly. Occasionally they made expeditions to famous places. Mr. Fleg was very interested in the "coleoptera and lepidoptera," as he still styled them, though all the family took after Colonel Burscough in

grouping them under the generic name of "bug." Cheadle and Robert were delighted with 'coon hunting and 'possum hunting—a nocturnal sport very dear to the heart of the darkey, who pursues these creatures with dogs and lanterns until the dogs mark a tree, when the hunters fall to with their axes and chip-chop in the dark mysterious woods, till the tree falls and the 'coon is grappling with the dogs, or the 'possum's soul is sent by one quick nip to happier hunting grounds. Or in the afternoon they would shoot Virginian partridges, a kind of quail, over pointers of the old English pottering sort, or in the evening shoot the mosquito-hawks (cousins of the whip-poor-will, but which the Virginians call by the unsavoury name of bat) swooping round and round, like swifts, and

most difficult shooting for an unpractised hand.

Time is forgotten in this happy land. Mealtimes are arbitrary—at the mercy of the cook. Bed-time is the time at which you are sleepy (there is no bed-time for the darkey, whose brain is never tired with thought). It is time to get up when you wake, and not before.

There was a charming simplicity about it all which won on Mr. Fleg, perhaps more than on the others. His host delighted in Mr. Fleg's learning, and probed those deeps of knowledge with enthusiasm. Cheadle made great friends with Miss Elsie Dormer. "The blind girl" was not repelled by his lack of nose. Robert observed them with interest, and wondered whether she still thought of the Creature,

of whom she never spoke. And he did not care to risk paining her by mention of him.

Robert was busy in his painting, chiefly landscape, to which the beautiful blueness of the Virginian distance lent wonderful effects. On one of the many cloudless, windless afternoons they had been sitting long under the verandah, smoking and listening to their host's interminable and ever interesting tales of the War, while the girls of the family went about their indoor work, or came out from time to time and listened to the chat. Then the sun went down with a run, as he does there.

As the top of his arc disappeared behind Peter's mountain, a horse's hoof sounded dully, then the opening of the gate was

heard. "It's Tom with the mails," the host said. And presently Tom came out of the dusk. He took the saddle and bridle off the horse and turned him loose to join the others, and, throwing the trappings into the porch, dived in his pockets for "The Mails."

"A big bunch for you, Professor," he said, handing them to Mr. Fleg. "One for you, Dad. Miss Elsie, where are you? There's one for you. Who's that? Oh, Mr. Cheadle! There's none for you. Mr. Burscough—yes, several for you."

Robert went indoors when the lamps were lighted to read his letters. The only one of interest was from his uncle. It was of oldish date—a chatty letter, telling him of the cricket, of Slocombe, of all his friends—of how they never saw

anything of Sybil since she had become Lady Morningham—but chiefly it was full of a grand new investment to which the Colonel had had the great good fortune to be introduced by Mr. Cheadle, senior.

“I believe, my boy,” the Colonel wrote, “I honestly believe that I am going to make a fortune. It is all backed by the most splendid names, even if Cheadle’s own were not a sufficient guarantee for me. I do not want to urge you to invest in it. You have a large fortune already, though I do not see why you should not increase it when such an opportunity as this offers; but for me, a poor man—and I have, I confess, been hard hit lately—it is a chance I feel I should be doing very wrong to miss. I have invested in it a

very large sum for me, and I have not the slightest doubt that we shall get an enormous return. I feel that I owe a very great deal to our good friend Cheadle."

Robert put the letter into his pocket. "Dear old man!" he thought, almost with tears in his eyes. "What does he want bothering about money for, so long as I am solvent? Look," he said aloud to young Cheadle, who just now came in with Miss Elsie Dormer, "our old people seem to be going strong." He handed Cheadle the letter.

Young Cheadle read it. The latter part he re-read. Then he began softly and meditatively "the Braes o' Mar."

He gave Robert back the letter still whistling. "A nice letter," he said, in

answer to Robert's interrogative look of surprise at his silence. "Glad they're all so well."

He and Robert slept in the same room. After they had got into bed that night, and were lying awake watching, through the open window, the fire-flies, which the natives profanely call lightning-bugs, dancing over the bushes in the garden, young Cheadle said—

"Say, are you asleep?"

"No."

"I guess I'm going to England."

"Good business," Robert said delightedly. "When? Next fall? Will you come with us?"

"No, not with you. Before the fall; I'll go to-morrow."

"What!" Robert gasped. "To-morrow?"

Do you mean to say you're going tomorrow—to England ? ”

“ That's right. Guess I'll just catch the Cunarder. Good night.”

And not another word could Robert get him to speak. The next morning young Cheadle packed his things. At breakfast he announced his intention carelessly, but, as Robert observed, with his eye on Miss Elsie Dormer. Miss Dormer did not raise her own eyes from buttering a corn-cob. All the rest of the family were instant with Cheadle that he should stop, or tell his reason for going. He did neither, but he wrote a letter to his foreman, on the ranche, with instructions, while the horses were being put into the buggy. After that he went in to the verandah, where Miss Dormer was. When he came

back he was again whistling "the Braes o' Mar," but it was still meditatively, not funereally. Robert could have interpreted it better in the latter key.

But just before he started, he came to Robert with the letter to his foreman in his hand. "I am adding a postscript to this, do you see? Guess that'll explain why I'm going."

This postscript ran thus. "Telegraph to Robert Burscough at Colonel Dormer's, Tour Springs, Jacobsville, Albemarle County, Virginia, the name of the Englishman who ruined you."

Then young Cheadle jumped into the buggy, and amidst a storm of "Good-byes," "Come-back-soons," and handkerchief wavings, was driven off through the orchard and the browsing horses and

the gateway, out upon the catastrophic road.

Two days later the name required came back by telegram from his foreman, "Mr. James Cheadle, senior."

CHAPTER XI.

ROBERT AND PROFESSOR FLEG GO HOME.

ROBERT had done a foolish thing about his letters. He had had them sent to the head office at Washington, so that their ultimate destination was at the mercy of the great Red Taped, which is a tyranny, with all the caprice of a tyrant, among the free and democratic citizens of the States. He should have had them sent to an English consulate.

But Robert did not bother himself about the mails. He went on with his painting and his lazy-loafing, and Mr.

Fleg with his entomology, through the beautiful autumn weather, wherein it was always afternoon, and at any word of departure their hosts rose up in protest.

Then, in the midst of the halcyon days, there fell a thunderbolt. A cablegram came for Robert, from England. It ran thus: "You had better come home at once; your uncle is far from well. C. DAVIES."

Then they had to say good-bye in sad earnest. There was a vagueness about the message which filled Robert with an anxiety he could hardly hide. What could be the matter with the Colonel? Why had not Mr. Davies been more explicit? The cablegram bore his sign-manual clearly enough. There was no docking of words to save expense.

It was like the sender. But if he were going to say so much, he might in mercy have said more.

We are inclined to say this in a sorrow whose extent is hidden from us—that we wish we knew the worst ; but perhaps it would not always be best so. Better uncertainty with a slice of hope at the bottom of the basket, than the certainty that means despair.

But it was not so bad as this, for at the British Consulate General at New York, whither Robert had cabled to Mr. Davies to send him another bulletin, the account was cheering. “Your uncle is much better. Looks forward to seeing you.”

This was a relief indeed, and they went on board the steamer with hearts a great deal lightened. They had caught

one of the fastest boats, and found no crowd; the crowd at that season was streaming in the other direction across the ocean.

When they had reached the Mersey and lay in the river, they looked with all anxiety at the approaching tender. Not till she got quite alongside did Robert recognise Mr. Davies among her passengers; but the moment he saw his queer drawn face, he knew that the look on it boded well. Then Mr. Davies shouted, regardless of the people, "It's all right—he's almost well again."

And soon they had climbed down off the great big liner on to the little tender.

"But what has been the matter with him?" Robert asked Mr. Davies, as soon as they had shaken hands.

“Been off his head, my dear fellow,” said Mr. Davies, with cheery directness—“clean off his head—shocking violent he was at times—and fearfully strong in that one arm of his—and as for his stump, I’ve got a bruise on me that’s as big as a soup-plate.”

“Oh dear, oh dear,” Robert sighed; “poor old uncle? But, do you mean to say you’ve been looking after him, nursing him?”

“No, no,” Mr. Davies said testily, “I just ran down from town for a bit to see how he was.”

“How long did you stay with him?” Robert persisted.

“Oh I don’t know,” the other said, shying his head away like a dog when you blow his ears; “a week or so about.”

“Mr. Davies,” Robert exclaimed, “you are the best fellow in the world. To think of you nursing him like that! I should not—” he stopped.

“No, I know,” Mr. Davies said for him, “you would never have thought I was the sort of fellow to put myself out of the way to do a friend a kindness. Go on—say it. It’s quite true too—never shall again, I expect.”

“I’ll bet you will,” said Robert, and seizing Mr. Davies’ reluctant hand he wrung it vigorously.

“Oh please don’t,” Mr. Davies pleaded, “it hurts; besides you’re making a fool of yourself before all these people; and what’s much worse, you’re making a fool of me.”

So Robert settled himself down to

hear all about it—the details of the poor Colonel's illness, and the measures they had to take for him, and how he was now getting perfectly well again, and was sane, though still weak.

“But what in the world made him go so?” Robert asked. “There must have been a cause?”

“Cause! 'course there was; Cheadle's the cause—cause enough too.”

“Cheadle,” said Robert bewildered, thinking of the younger; “why he's only just come home.”

“Oh, I mean old soapy Cheadle, not the young 'un who speaks through a nose he has'nt got. The young 'un's a brick, I should think; but the old 'un's just one of the most Satanic frauds that ever ran about the City.”

“But how did Cheadle send the poor old man mad?”

“Rotten Fish Company, that’s how he did it. Got the dear old innocent to put all the little money he had into it. Then the thing began to go all crooked—that’s to say that the money went into Cheadle’s pocket, instead of breeding dividends for the Colonel’s—and so, having lost all his money, the old man thought he might as well lose his head too. He’d plenty of reason, I should think. If a man isn’t going to go off his head over losing his money, Heaven only knows what is likely to make him.”

Robert laughed.

“I have’nt half finished my news for you though, yet,” Mr. Davies went on, studying Robert.

The latter looked past him. Was it Sybil he was going to mention? He had not trusted himself to speak about her."

"What next then?" he asked.

"Why, you're going into Parliament?"

"What?" Robert shouted, so loud that the people near them jumped.

"Why, your uncle wrote to you about it, don't you know? He wasn't mad over that, for I saw your letter. Surely you remember."

"Oh, I remember uncle saying there was a chance of the seat being vacant, and would I stand, and so on, and I wrote back, yes; but I never heard any more about it, and I never thought any more about it. What's happened?"

"Why you've been nominated, and

lots of swells of the party have been down and told the people what a wonderful fellow you are; but, bless you, they might just as well have stayed away. It's enough for free and enlightened electors that you captained the county cricket, and so on. You're certain to get in by a most howling majority."

"Then I shall have to speak I suppose, sha'nt I?" Robert asked in alarm.

"Certainly. Parliament means speaking, does'nt it?"

'All speech and no work
Spells Parliament, since Burke,'

don't you know?"

This made Robert very quiet until the tender reached the landing stage. He was pleased with the Parliamentary prospect, but he was going into it very

blindfold. He had views upon politics, and these had strengthened in the year or two of his wanderings, but he had had very little practice in speaking.

On the way down in the train, the change from American scenery they had left was very marked to the travellers. There it had been on such a grand, big scale. The fields were prairies. Here the country looked like a patch-work counterpane in comparison; but the red tiled cottages were warm and homely, and the beauty of the trees and hedges more winning and moving to the Englishmen than the cold vastness of the American plain.

But Robert had to hear a fearful list of auruncular iniquities, retailed in Mr. Davies' best and lightest style. The

Colonel, it seemed, had for a long while before been giving premonitory symptoms of the breakdown, living in a chronic state of hot excitement.

“Doing awful things, upon my soul, he has, your old uncle. A lady came to Pebblecombe, a Mrs. Etheredge, by name; took a villa there. Hullo! what’s the matter? Is she friend of yours?”

“Well, yes, I think so—was once,” Robert admitted.

“Golden, very golden, too golden—auricomous almost—soulful eyes. Is that her?”

Robert nodded. “She had lovely hair,” he said thoughtfully.

“Hum! Old enough to be your mother, my dear boy. Not exactly the age for being your aunt by marriage, though—

eh? That's what she was after, I assure you—solemn fact. 'Married already?' Rather—I should think so; and unmarried again too; got a divorce, and husband brought cross-case. She was too golden. It's a way these golden women have. Faults on both sides, I suspect—generally are. Mistake matrimony—man's a polygamous animal. Don't you think so? Did you go to Utah?"

"Yes, I did," Robert said; "and I think going there's about the best cure for polygamous instincts a man could have."

"Ah well! perhaps so," Mr. Davies asserted, with an air of regretting a cherished theory. "Failure of polygamy only proves what I say, though," he went on more brightly. "Polygamy only means matrimony in the plural; and the more of

it the worse it is. Mistake matrimony. Sybil finds it so, I'm afraid."

As he said this, an expression of trouble chased the cynicism from his queer face. Robert winced ; but whether this item of Mr. Davies' news gave him relief or joy he could not have told.

"So this Mrs. Etheredge went to your uncle's capacious heart at once. You know him—what he is. Gallant alike in love and war. So here was case of beauty in distress. He squired the golden lady round. 'Jammed if he knew what he wouldn't do to any one who dared to say a word against her reputation.' You know how the dear old man would talk."

Robert winced again. He could hardly bear to hear his old uncle spoken of thus ; though he knew every word of it was

likely to be true, and though he knew by this time that Mr. Davies had put himself out of the way to help the poor Colonel in his trouble, in a manner that few of those who claimed much tenderer feelings would have done.

For he had come down from town when the Colonel was in his most dangerous phase, and had utterly given up his own business for the time being to look after his old friend, staying in the house with him, sitting up with him, and nursing him with the tenderness of a woman and a man's strength. This latter quality had sometimes been useful, when the Colonel's mood was violent.

The truth was that out of this evil thing of Sybil's marriage had sprung this much at least of good, that Mr. Davies had

taken up his flagging sense of moral responsibility, and had made a strenuous effort, as some sort of recompense for the ill wrought of his past carelessness, to be helpful to others, so far as his studious training in the paths of cheerful selfishness would let him.

“The golden lady,” said Mr. Davies, resuming his parable, “had a black thing that she called a dog. Its hair had come off with over feeding. Its body was quite round, and it had goggle eyes and a whip tail. It was like an alderman—before the County Council.”

“I know,” Robert interposed ; “Rosalind.”

“I think the monster’s name was Rosalind,” Mr. Davies assented. “I never cut it up to see, though I often wished to ;

but I know its liver was like a Strasburg goose's. Its temper was like your poor uncle's—the curry-powder brand; but it had no redeeming virtues. It was especially fond, gastronomically, of postmen and telegraph boys. Well, your uncle and Mrs. Etheredge one day went out driving—oh, they often did! often, I assure you. Going up the hill past Richards' farm the carriage had to walk, and Rosalind was let out for gentle exercise. Most of her time, when she was not eating her dinner, or a postman, she snored on a Cashmeer shawl. Now, old Richards had a collie sheep-dog—(old Richards' is about the only vote in White-Cross or Little Pipkin there's a ghost of a doubt about your getting; you'll see why in a minute). This sheep-dog—it always was a brute,

rushing out and barking at everything that passed—came out as usual, as your uncle and the golden lady went up the hill, and, seeing this thing, Rosalind, crawling along beside the carriage, thought it was a corpulent rat most likely, and just took it up in its mouth; and then, when it found its mistake, spat it out, and went to get something to wash the taste out of its mouth. It was all done in about ten seconds, but it was long enough to finish Rosalind; she was a beautiful corpse. So the carriage brought home a bundle of golden hysterics that they called Mrs. Etheredge; a round, black ball of dogskin, much preferable to the living Rosalind; and a one-armed, one-eyed volcano, in a state of dangerous activity, which we knew as Colonel Burscough.

“Then he wanted to know what he could do to Richards. Would the law hold him guiltless, if he went and ran him through with his sword? The best authorities thought not. Might he horse-whip him, then? No. ‘Then,’ said the Colonel, as another great official has said before him, ‘the law’s a hass.’

“He’s a clever old gentleman, is your uncle, Robert; I can tell you that. What do you think he did? He invited down Spiking—you know, Jack Spiking of the 8th Lancers, the man who has the bull-dog—to stay with him; and he asked the bull-dog too. One fine day the Colonel took Spiking for a drive; the bull-dog, muzzled, of course, toiled along behind. It was a hot day. Your uncle is a merciful man. It went to his heart to see the

poor dog panting and labouring in his muzzle.

“‘Jammed shame, Spiking,’ he said, ‘that poor dog. Get down, sir, and take the muzzle off him. We’re clear of the houses now. We shall meet nobody.’

“So they were, clear of the houses, all except Richards’ farm. The bull-dog went merrily, relieved of his muzzle. Then they came to Richards’. Out came Mr. Sheep-dog, when he heard the wheels, barking and jumping. The bull-dog made no answer; he did not seem to be taking the slightest notice of the other, until he had ranged up alongside of him. Then, without saying a word, he reached up for the sheep-dog’s throat, and the two dogs were a heaving lump upon the road. The sheep-dog couldn’t speak, and the other

was too busy. Spiking looked round at the sudden stop in the bark. Then he yelled to the Colonel to pull up. But the Colonel pretended he couldn't hold the horse in. Didn't get pulled up for a quarter of a mile. When Spiking got to the battle-field, the bull-dog came to him a little breathless, but wagging his corkscrew tail, and the sheep-dog's soul had gone to meet Rosalind's in the dog's hereafter.

"So, perhaps, there'll be a difficulty about Richards' vote."

"Richards knew it was planned, I suppose?" Robert asked.

"Fool, if he didn't! Besides, the Colonel was talking about it everywhere. Old Todgers in the club ventured to say he did not think it the right thing to have done, and the Colonel promptly told him

he was a 'd——d old fool!' he did indeed. No covering up the taste of it in 'jam.' Dental pure and simple, I assure you. Old Todgers reported him to the committee, and the committee said they thought he ought to apologize. Splendid letter he wrote to Todgers then. Said, 'I withdraw the word "d——d," because it is blasphemous; but I adhere to the word "fool," because it is true; and it seems scarcely possible that Mr. Todgers can raise any objection on the score of the word "old."'

"But the best thing of all was that old Todgers justified your uncle's description to the letter by taking this note about and showing it to everybody, and asking whether it was meant for an apology or not. Oh, they've had splendid doings, I

assure you! I only wish I had been there all the time, and not sweltering away in town.

“Then the last act in the comedy was that he wanted to fight Cheadle, ‘with any weapon he pleased, with sword or pistol, on horse or on foot.’ After that, it left off being comedy; it became tragedy. He is well now, perfectly; but he is fearfully pulled down.”

And so, indeed, Robert found him. The old face that he knew so well, of a jovial, choleric red, was pale and thin, and there were great lines and hollows under his eyes; but the eyes smiled with a light they had not had in them for weeks when they saw Robert. Uncle and nephew were soon deep in mutual narration of the events of the last two years.

“Hullo, though!” Robert interrupted; “you smoking a pipe, uncle! What’s the meaning of that? I thought you couldn’t bear anything but a ‘Trichi’ cheroot.”

“Well, my boy,” the Colonel said sadly, “it means just this. It means that I am a ruined man. I have been a sad fool, Robert—a sad fool. But what reason had I to mistrust Cheadle? He assured me all was above-board and honest in the jammed fish thing. Anyhow, I shall come out of the fish thing with probably not a *son* to live upon. I am here now as a pensioner on your bounty. I have not a roof of my own to put my head under. So, don’t you see, Robert,” the old man went on, changing his note to one of very forced cheeriness, “I must cultivate habits of economy; and, to begin with, I’ve

given up my 'Trichis' and taken to a pipe."

"Ugh! nasty tobacco, too," Robert exclaimed, smelling it. "Where are all your trichis, though? They're not in the old cupboard."

"They're up there," the Colonel answered, pointing to the top of the said cupboard. "I put them all up there, so that I shouldn't be tempted to smoke 'em."

"Lend me your pipe and 'baccy a minute, will you, please?" Robert said.

The Colonel obediently gave them to him.

"Thank you," Robert said, and forthwith put both into the fire, restraining his uncle, who would have rescued them with the tongs; but it was with perfect

pleasure that the old man watched them perish.

"I wish we could put old Cheadle in there along with them," Robert said, as they grew red and crackled.

"Perhaps he'll be somewhere like it some day," the Colonel suggested grimly.

"Now, then, for the cheroots," said Robert; and, climbing on a chair, he fetched down all the boxes that the Colonel had piled there with so much labour.

He filled the poor empty flap of the sleeve of the amputated arm with cheroots, as of old. He even went so far as to light one himself, and stick it between the Colonel's lips, before he would declare himself satisfied to sit down and talk.

After this, whether as a consequence of Robert's return, or of the resumption of the cheroots, the Colonel picked up strength very quickly. Robert's time was fully occupied in seeing Slocombe and all his old haunts and friends, and also in canvassing votes for the forthcoming election. But he was so great a local favourite that there was scarcely a possibility of defeat. All that part of the country, with the possible exception of Farmer Richards, might be faithfully depended upon to rise superior to what it was pleased to call its political opinions, and to vote solid for "Master Robert."

Robert looked forward eagerly to entering political life. He was not without views. It was scarcely possible for any one of the most ordinary intelligence to

travel for two years in company with Professor Fleg among new people and institutions (which always had to be discussed by the method of comparison with things at home) without forming views of some sort of value.

It was a moment, too, when a very heavy protective tariff bill in the States was a subject of much discussion in England; and Mr. Fleg, without Robert's discovering it, had been talking into him, as if he were a phonograph, much about this tariff bill that it was Mr. Fleg's subtle intention that he should bring out in the forthcoming Parliamentary session. It is said that Parliament will always listen to a man, however inexperienced in debate, who has real knowledge of the subject matter, and can say something new about

it. So that the double-sighted spectacles saw nothing too utterly presumptuous in the expectation that Robert, in his first session, might make a speech that would be listened to.

CHAPTER XII.

YOUNG CHEADLE IN ENGLAND.

WHEN young Cheadle reached England, he went straight away to Pebblecome. He had no difficulty in getting his name put down as a visiting member of the club; but at first there was some question about his reception by its members. Visitation of the sins of the father upon the child is universal. But then the club reflected that young Cheadle had been in America, so that he could scarcely have had a hand in this particular Cheadleian scheme. It was further in his favour that

he was not staying in his father's house at Pebblecome, but had taken lodgings of his own. Moreover, he had never, as a boy, been hand in glove with his parent. In fact, if there was one human being whom it was possible to conceive the benevolent Cheadle hating, that human being was his son.

Moreover, the members of the club had mutually bored each other *ad nauseam*, by talk over this Fish Company; and the arrival of a stranger who was willing, and even anxious, as it seemed, to hear the whole tale from the beginning, many times over, was a boon. And, certainly, the telling of it had an added piquancy when the son of the arch-villain was in the audience.

Very soon, therefore, young Cheadle was in possession of all the truth and

fiction with regard to the Fish Company which Pebblecombe was able to put at his disposal.

He discussed it, over "the Braes o' Mar" in all their tenses, and when he had worked the tune to reel-time, he had made up his mind. He went to London, and paid a call of filial duty at his father's hotel. His parent was not at home ; but he found, awaiting the elder Mr. Cheadle's return, a gentleman of quiet address and prepossessing manner.

The gentleman did not mention his name, until young Cheadle introduced himself as his father's son, whereupon the quiet gentleman replied—

"In that case, I think, I may also introduce myself. My name is Captain Conynghame."

Young Cheadle showed no surprise ; nothing but a genial pleasure at the introduction. He gave no sign that he had frequently heard of Captain Conynghame at Pebblecombe, though not as his father's friend. They chatted with the utmost friendliness. Young Cheadle beguiled the time by telling Captain Conynghame tales of Western life ; amongst the rest, how his nose had suffered mutilation, and many other facts and fancies of interest. At length he looked at his watch, and, saying that he regretted that he could wait no longer, wished his new friend a cordial good-bye, and begged him to tell Mr. Cheadle, the elder, that he hoped soon to call again.

A quarter-an-hour later Mr. Cheadle, senior, returned.

"Your son's just been here," Captain Conynghame began, and——"

"My what!" Mr. Cheadle exclaimed, almost paralysed with surprise.

"Your son."

"Man, he's in America."

"*Was*, you mean. He's come back. He was in this room not ten minutes ago."

"My son! Describe him."

Captain Conynghame did so, Mr. Cheadle nodding the while, in recognition of the truth of the description.

"What doubtless alters his appearance somewhat," Captain Conynghame concluded, "is that he has lost half his nose."

"Eh? Frost-bite?"

"No; Yankee-bite!"

"None of your riddles, if you please, Slybacon," said Mr. Cheadle severely.

“I mean they fought, he and a Yankee, and when they were separated, half his nose was down the Yankee’s throat. And he never recovered it.”

“Poisoned the Yankee, did it? I’m sure I’m not surprised.”

“No, I don’t mean that. Your son never recovered it; never got it back, I mean.”

“No, that was scarcely to be expected. But, do you mean to say he’s been here, talking to you, telling you all this? Great Heavens!” exclaimed Mr. Cheadle in sudden alarm, “you didn’t tell him your name, did you?”

Certainly not, Mr. Cheadle,” said the quiet gentleman. “Do you question my discretion?”

“Look here, Slybacon,” Mr. Cheadle

exclaimed, with a bullying manner that Pebblecombe did not know in him, "tell me the truth, if that glib tongue of yours can tell it. Swear to me you did not tell him your name; or, by Heaven, I'll tell on you. I'll tell all I know. And you know what that means."

"Upon my sacred word of honour, as a gentleman, Mr. Cheadle, I swear to you I did not breathe my name to him. But you do not mean it, do you? It's only your joking. You would not do me an injury?"

Mr. Cheadle appeared satisfied. He became engrossed with his thoughts.

"Come back again, has he?" he said, in half audible soliloquy. "Come back again, after all I have done for him. How could I have done more? I sent him to the

farthest country I could think of. Gave him no money, so that he should not be able to get back again ; and yet here he is at home ! Come home without a *sou*, to live on me."

The object of all this paternal solicitude had meantime put himself into a hansom, and been driven to a dingy rabbit-warren which was the nest of a leading firm of city solicitors. He was a clever young man. He did not want to see either of the partners, he said. He wanted to see the head clerk. Partners in big firms are apt to be ornamental. Head clerks are apt to be much the reverse, but useful.

He was shown into the useful man's room. The head clerk's name was Peabody, and his outline suggested that he tried to live up to it.

Young Cheadle soon found that he liked Peabody, and Peabody seemed to like him. Young Cheadle was straightforward; and the lawyer liked this. He had been too much handicapped by clients who thought they did a clever thing in keeping facts back from him, not to value straightforwardness. Presently young Cheadle said—

“Well, you’ll do. I reckon you’re square.”

“I reckon I’m round,” Peabody answered, with a chuckle; then they talked business.

Cheadle told Peabody all he knew about the Fish Company. He told him of the Slybacon petition, and of his suspicions of the blameless Slybacon. He further instructed Peabody to lay the facts of the

case, so far as he could gather them, before the best Company lawyer of the day, to ask his advice, and, thus equipped, to await further instructions. He had to enter into some rather delicate explanations about his relations to his father, to assure Mr. Peabody that his action had any more guarantee of genuineness than the Slybacon one ; but, after all, it is not considerations of this fine nature that turn city solicitors off the line of business.

“Very well,” said young Cheadle, “then that’s settled. Now there’s another thing I want you to do for me. If one is to have influence in a Company of this sort, it’s a good thing to have a pretty good pile of shares—eh, Mr. Peabody, is that so ?”

The little round man assented.

“Well, and I think,” young Cheadle proceeded, “that I’d like to have a fair pile of shares in this Fish Company. Could you manage that for me—to get ’em bought for me?”

“Why, it’s not exactly my line of business that, Mr. Cheadle,” Mr. Peabody said. “Your stockbroker——”

“Oh yes, I know that, of course,” young Cheadle answered; “but what I want is to buy up certain shares—the shares of a certain holder—and I don’t want him to know that I’m the buyer; that’s what I want you to manage for me, do you see? I want to buy up Colonel Burscough’s shares—40,000 dollars’ worth in all.”

“But, gracious me, Mr. Cheadle; that’s

£8000!" exclaimed little Peabody, growing almost oblong in his astonishment.

"Well, I know that," said young Cheadle coolly. "I can do that, I reckon. Do you think I haven't passed my standards?"

"You've passed any standard I ever made for a young man," Mr. Peabody said helplessly. "But tell me—you might tell me—what your object is?"

The poor Peabody had grown quite jelly-fishy flaccid in his surprise.

"Well, my object is this—I reckon it's plain enough. This gentleman is a friend of the great Cheadle family. Very well, one member of the family pays him back. That's all. That's fair, isn't it? He's got nothing to grumble at, has he?"

"Nothing to grumble at! I should

think he hasn't. But what do you expect to pay for these shares ? ”

“ Expect to pay for these shares ! Oh yes ; I see what you mean. I don't suppose they're worth much. But I want to buy them at par—that's my price—not a cent. above or below.”

“ Mr. Cheadle,” said Mr. Peabody, “ you must be mad.”

“ I expect so,” said young Cheadle. “ I suppose you've had mad clients before me ? ”

“ They're most of them mad, I think ; but not quite in your way. You're either mad or just the very honestest man I ever met in my life. But there—honest—it's not honesty, it's madness ; that's what it is.”

“ All right, all right, Mr. Peabody ; we

needn't fight about it. It's madness, that's what it is. That's all right."

Mr. Peabody wiped the perspiration off his round, bald head.

"And if I should undertake to do this mad job," he said, "of course, I must see your securities ; and I must have a power of attorney from you to buy the shares for the transferee that I shall name, if you don't want your name to appear as direct buyer. I can't afford to be mad, if you can, Mr. Cheadle."

"Oh no, of course not ; I understand that," young Cheadle assented. "I wouldn't expect you to ; and now, you had better be off and call on the Company's stockbrokers, and see what you can arrange."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE "UNCERTAIN AGE" OF MRS. ETHEREDGE.

ROSALIND had been stuffed, in Mr. Rowland Ward's best manner, into a hideously faithful resemblance of the existence which once did duty with Rosalind for life. She lay as in the days of her chronic liver complaint, under the cashmere shawl, under a sanctified glass case, in the drawing-room of Mrs. Etheredge's villa, at Pebblecombe. If she could but have been fitted with a snoring arrangement, the imitation would have been perfect. As it

was, it was greatly preferable to the living Rosalind. Her eyes had a glassy, perpetual stare, which hypnotised the visitor into a catalepsy. Her virtues were recorded in an epitaph, as veracious as most of its kind, on a tombstone in the back garden. Mrs. Etheredge could see the tombstone from the drawing-room sofa. Once, by an abrupt reference to the deceased, a member of the Pebblecombe Club reduced Mrs. Etheredge to a flood of tears. All the club benefited by his experience, and Rosalind's name was never mentioned.

People seldom went singly to call on Mrs. Etheredge. Ladies seldom called on her at all. But men are more charitable to “golden women.” Two or three would go together, and try to bear her

conversation by relays. It was far easier in company—like facing a ghost.

Robert, indeed, truly felt as if he were going to face a ghost. He wondered how this lady, who once had seemed so infinitely gracious, would strike him, after his two years of varied experience. He had an idea that there had been something, after all, a little false and forced about the graciousness which once had seemed so charming. He would see.

He was not so rash as to go unsupported. He took with him his usual protector, Professor Fleg.

It was too cruel of Robert to come upon Mrs. Etheredge thus unprepared. The start that the lady gave when his name was announced bore vivid testimony to the shock with which it came upon her.

"Ah," she murmured softly (many of her sentences began with a soft, sad "ah!"), "after so many years!" And she put her hand to the place where she supposed her heart to be, and then pressed it pathetically. Then, as Robert introduced "Professor Fleg," she bravely rallied, with a sweet, sad smile, to grapple with social exigencies.

Mrs. Etheredge reclining æsthetically upon the sofa, received the mention of the Professor's name with an inclination of her golden poetic head towards the right shoulder of her sea-green tea gown.

"Ah, such a privilege, Professor, to meet an intellectual person like yourself."

The implied comparison between Robert Burscough's intellect and the Professor's was a little painful.

“What a cheerful view you do have from here,” Robert observed, seeing Mr. Fleg rather at a loss for an answer, a-stare at Rosalind’s glass eyes. “You see the people playing tennis so nicely, and you’re well out from under the eternal shadow of that hill.”

“Ah, indeed, Mr. Burscough; but we are very much under the shadow of the hill,” said Mrs. Etheredge, contradicting him with an air of infinitely sweet and resigned sadness. “But I do not repine. It is good for us to be in the twilight sometimes. Then the spirit is the more free to hold glorious communion with other spirits that have gone before. In the garish sunshine our minds are apt to be filled with the brightness and colour, so as to rest contented upon outward and

fleshly things. Is it not so, Mr. Fleg?" she said, turning to the Professor as the more able to enter into her feelings.

"I should conceive, my dear madam," Mr. Fleg answered, "that we are entitled to avail ourselves of what small share of sunshine we may find across our path in this imperfect and, at best, somewhat gloomy world."

"Ah, true," said Mrs. Etheredge, looking forth at him with intense hollow eyes, and golden head drawn back upon her cushions, rather like a puff adder preparing to strike. "It is an imperfect world, is it not?"

The stupendous query, thus tragically launched, reduced Mrs. Etheredge's visitors to perfect muteness. There was a solemn pause. They gazed, with fascinated horror, at Rosalind.

Then Mrs. Etheredge said, "Ah, tell me, Mr. Fleg. What a glorious mission is yours (you once held a high position at Fawkes' Hospital, I am told), saving our poor mortal bodies from pain—second only to one other!"

"Ah, my dear madam, I have but little to do with bodies till they have given so sadly convincing a proof of their mortality as to die."

"I do not understand. Are you, then, a clergyman? That is a more noble calling still. Yet, no—even so, you would be as useful in life as in death. I do not understand. I have some cemetery shares. It is very sad; but they pay extremely well. Have you to do with cemeteries? What are you Mr, Fleg?"

"I, my dear madam, am an anatomist.

I have little to do with bodies save in the province of the dissecting room.”

“What!” exclaimed Mrs. Etheredge, almost vivaciously, as she recoiled deeper into her cushions in her horror. “Do you cut up bodies?”

“My profession does, I fear, admit of description in the terms,” Mr. Fleg said.

“Ah me! ah me! how sad! And I had thought of you so differently,” replied the lady, with affecting candour. “Yet, surely you do not love your—your dreadful trade? It is for its noble ends you follow it! Such means, I suppose, are necessary. Ah, it is very, very sad.”

“Your feelings, my dear madam, are most natural—most natural, if I may say so, to a tender heart. The science of anatomy is a means indeed, as you truly

say, to noble ends ; yet in itself it is, I do assure you, of absorbing interest."

"Ah, it is very sad," Mrs. Etheredge repeated. "But, tell me, Mr. Fleg; you are a lover of poetry, are you not? Ah, do not tell me no. You must love it; ah, yes, I know you must. It is the language, the only language, of souls—in which kindred souls can hold communion." Mrs. Etheredge gazed at Mr. Fleg as though to draw his soul to her own through his eyes. "Ah, how sad it is that so few can understand it, the ecstasy of that spiritualized, etherealized passion, in which two souls meet who are on the same electric plane, and their psychic atoms vibrate in harmony, producing the melody of heavenly poetry. Do you see halos, Mr. Fleg?"

"Round the moon frequently, my dear madam—a sure sign, as I understand, of approaching disturbances."

"Ah no, Mr. Fleg," said the lady, "around the heads of those with whom one's own psychic atoms are in perfect or partial vibratory harmony. It is a rare and precious gift, Mr. Fleg. I have it in great fulness. Around the heads of those whose souls are pure, I see a halo of pure white light. Ah me, there are few indeed whose souls and halos are thus pure! Your own, Mr. Fleg, is of peculiar, though not perfect pureness. I may congratulate you, if you will permit me, on your halo ; but, ah, so many are of the wrong colour ; My late husband's halo, I regret to say, was of a bad colour." And the poor lady sighed deeply.

Mr. Fleg and Robert were by this time in the condition to which visitors generally were reduced by a call on Mrs. Etheredge. Mr. Fleg, in particular, who had borne the brunt of the attack, showed great signs of exhaustion.

“As a lover of poetry, Mr. Fleg,” the lady continued, “might I venture to take the liberty of asking you to read over a little tiny poem of my own—a very humble thing—a single sonnet. I think of making it the first of a sonnet sequence. Your opinion would be infinitely precious to me.”

Mrs. Etheredge's poetry had grown, as became her years and her rather delicate social position, less erotic and more theosophic. There is almost more in a sonnet than appears at first sight. It is like a

hard boiled egg. It looks a little thing, but you feel as if you had done a good deal before you have finished it. And this is peculiarly the case with a theosophic sonnet.

While Mr. Fleg was endeavouring to understand it, Robert, of whom Mrs. Etheredge did not take the slightest notice, was occupied with many thoughts. Could it really be that this woman, wrapt in a sea-green gown and infinite affectations and golden hair-dye, was the woman who once had seemed to him the most gracious being the world could hold ! It was so. He saw that she had changed ; that she had made it her *métier* to attract by her soulfulness, which might be immortal, since her charms of person were wearing out. He knew, too, that this, her

theosophic manner, was adopted for the edification of Mr. Fleg—that it must have been by wielding her wand in another manner that she had brought the gallant Colonel to her feet; but though Robert knew this, he also knew, over and above it, that the chief change of all was in himself, that he had grown clearer-eyed, and could better tell how much of Mrs. Etheredge was woman, and how much affectation. Would it be so, he asked himself, with that other woman, Sybil, who had been so infinitely more to him, when he saw her again; for since he had decided on entering the political world, it did not seem that they could be long without meeting? But he did not think that in her case there would be like disillusionment. He must wait for time to show.

Meanwhile, Mr. Fleg had reached the end of the sonnet, and murmuring some indistinct phrases, which seemed to give Mrs. Etheredge greater gratification than they might have done had they been more articulate, he laid the sonnet reverently on the table, and they took their leave.

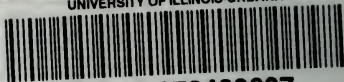
Both were thoughtful over this interview. Amusement, to which Mr. Fleg was too kind to give words, beamed from the double spectacles. Robert's portion was rather one of shame, but all he said was—

“Well, I've seen monstrosities ; but commend me to that for a masterpiece—I mean that fixed-eyed dog.”

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